Edge Hill University

# Re-Imagining Coloured Identities in Volume Please!: Performance encounter as critical cultural dialogue in the making of a contemporary musical

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# Abstract

This thesis comprises:

- Performances of *Volume Please!* which was staged in The Rose Theatre, Edge Hill University and subsequently in Westbury, South Africa in 2018.

- and this written component or complementary writing which functions as a commentary to the performance by elucidating the politics of identity that informed its creation.

The performance was a confluence of performance-poetry, jazz and autobiography. It detailed (as does the written component) the relationship between the candidate and his deceased father, and the precariousness of his position as a Coloured man in South Africa, where he is neither 'black enough nor white enough'. Both performance and written commentary expound the subversive improvisatory challenge to hegemony by jazz as an improvisatory phenomenon, and a release from subjugation in non-verbal self-expression where the 'self' is always in post-modern deferral.

The written component examines the manner in which historical narrative conventions implicate in popular cultural practices. To this end, a closer reading of *King Kong* (1959) - the first internationally acclaimed musical, then billed as an Africa jazz opera – reveals the first omission of the Coloured (Mixed Race) subject. Such omission was arguably not arbitrary when considering the liminal positionality of the Coloured subjects in the South African political collective unconscious. Central to the reading of cultural praxis alongside political thought, is how the two imbricate in the construction, consumption, and maintenance of identity phenomena. In other words, how the imperial dominant political ideologies colluded with a popular musical in the meanings of Coloured identities on a mass scale. Consequently, this study links this phenomenon to the public construction and consumption of Coloured identities in popular South African musical performance practices. Advancing from the empirical premise of the marginal socio-political status of the South African coloured subjects, the writing brings to the fore the connectedness of cultural praxis with the political realities. To this end, the project employs contemporary black performance strategies – jazz, spoken-word-poetry, and autobiography to argue for a radical shift in our understanding of Colouredness.

# Introduction to complementary writing

## The making of Volume Please!

*Volume Please!* is a stage performance play constructed out of two autobiographical texts. As chronicles of a father/son relationship, the texts also served as literary sites for their encounter. Following this theme, the dramatized exploration of their relationship assumes a first-person narrative voice to convey the inner world of an eleven-year-old boy. The boy's lamentation over a short-lived paternal relationship informs the overriding theme of the play.  Added to it is the boy's confusion at the discovery that his father was Coloured (of mixed-race parentage in South African speak).

## Production Description

The production consisted of a suspended 1950s checkered zoot, and a pair of two-tone Florsheim shoes under a spotlight in the background. As predominant set, the elevated suit assumes autonomous life and evokes bodily absence in its heightened iconic status. On stage left, under a spotlight, was a manned upright bass, opposite an acoustic guitar and the trumpet on stands respectively. Carved on the stage floor by sparse lighting, were three main performance spaces spanning a sequential spectrum of 1950s Sophiatown, 1970s Bosrand, and Johannesburg's perennial gold mining.

Clad in African dashiki, and to the accompaniment of a double bass, the actor employed singing, chanting, spoken–word-poetry, live jazz guitar and trumpet

performances to segue between geographies, historical epochs, and the subjective identities these had engendered. Patrick, the performer's father, and around whom the narrative pivoted, was evoked through the jazz motif.

# Autobiographical Context

'Bosrand is a world that fell from grace…' papa says to bro. Mbani, his friend.

'And Johannesburg?'

'A city banished from hell', bro Mbani joins in, his bearded upper lip fixing for a guffaw.

But I can hardly hear the words, which quickly drown in the rising tide of their chuckles.

I do not understand what they are talking about, I am only eleven years old. If this was not papa's favourite joke, I wouldn't have guessed the string of words that followed. English? That also I do not understand, and I do not know Johannesburg. But I know it is a big city. Very big. I think I know what papa will say next. I wait for it. And it comes. Sophiatown…jazz…Westbury…Steytler street…and Mike the saxophonist. Johannesburg is in every puff of the Lexington cigarette smoke that escapes pap's lips as he speaks.

I think that is the reason why in my mind I see Johannesburg rising out of huge clouds of smoke. Train smoke, factory smoke, and choking smoke from the twisted nostrils of the incredible beast that Johannesburg is. I have heard stories about the city of gold, stories that have left pictures in my mind, fuzzy and jumbled pictures. I join these pictures together and before you know it, Johannesburg, two hours away from Bosrand, walks in reeling like a drunk from Chango's joint.

But not so with my mother, who seems to have the real picture of Johannesburg. Especially when she refers to my father, a scowl on her face, as that mfan' ase drophini, 'a city boy'. Her lukewarm response to my nagging. Although I know her answer already, I can't help myself asking the question 'when will papa return from Johannesburg?'. Days roll into weeks, then wax into months.

And then one evening, when we least expect it, knuckles creep up the door like a piano trill, my father's signature knock. Mama and I run scampering to the door, she almost trips, I think it's on account of the small living room. I could be wrong, considering mama is of big build. And there he stands like a black god, papa. The paraffin lamp casts shaky light on him, revealing a fancy suit and brown suede shoes. We quickly help him carry the bags in. Phew! they are heavy, almost breaking at the seams.

The next few days bring big changes. The Lexington cigarette smoke fills our living room where Satchmo's trumpet blows music from America. My mother's kitchen, oh so decked with big city glitter, is a showroom. Fancy cutlery, crockery, and curtains with rich folds hang high from ceiling to floor, hiding the matchbox size of X924, Gobeni street. Mama is the envy of Bosrand. Mornings no longer wake up in the sun, but in her kitchen where lively chatter, the chinking of fancy china, and the rooibos tea aroma hang like a cloud above the women who have come to see the display.

Those who haven't been to X924 can tell that Patrick is back from the swagger in my mother's walk which also parades the latest enchanting seshoeshoe designs, whose fabric still discharge that unmistakable fresh whiff. At school the bell rings, announcing the first break. Only half a skip and a hop, and I am home. A Valiant, a Peugeot 404, and a Buick parked outside tell me, bro. Mbani, Kid-legs, and

Slumber are home. Diamond smugglers and papa's friends. I run to the gate, anticipating the coins they will pour into my little hands - big silver five bob coins with cranes eternally walking on long legs, and five cents, and ten cents. Whenever they come visiting, home turns into a wonderland. 'Volume please! Volume please!' papa's voice booms above the deafening roar of laughter and Satchmo's horn as I run in.

But today the sky hangs low over X924, bringing along the howling wind that ruffles our rickety rooftop. I think the angel that visited papa last night came riding in the fury of the storm. I feel its chilling breath on my face as I make my way to mamkhulu, mama's sister, to break the news. Each step I take is heavy against the avalanche of dust clouds that stretch the length of Gobeni Street. I see Mamkhulu's house as I turn the corner of Mamaki's house, otherwise called Bra Babes' shebeen, a major landmark in Bosrand, but only after Bra Chango's which is famous for its cold beers. Everybody says Mamaki is the most beautiful girl in all of Bosrand. She has very light skin and long hair, like Sis Rachel, her mother who is Coloured (mixed-race in South African speak).

The wind has changed direction when I return from Mamkhulu. I feel its sharp teeth nibbling on my legs. It pushes hard against me, forcing tears from my eyes. I do not know who sent word to them, but the church women who arrive with me at the gate enter the house. Mamkhulu, aunt Panki, and aunt Mehlwana enter shortly after and walk past the church women now assembled in the living room straight to the bedroom where mama is swathed in blankets against the cold. They burst into tears as they cuddle together. Their pain ripples throughout the house. The sharp smell of rooibos tea brewing on the Welcome Dover fills the whole world. A scent of death. That week will be a long one. Very long. And I will discover for the first time that my father was Coloured. I will also learn that he was once a school teacher and

that he played the piano in a jazz band in 1950s Sophiatown.

It won't be but until forty years later when I set out, armed with a few IsiXhosa and SeSotho songs, some original South African jazz pieces, and a tapestry of broken memories. The only props to help me needle the contours of Patrick's life story for an entry point. They hurl me to the dawn of the 60s.

# The Father's world

It is 1963, and thirty-something-year-old Patrick, the principal of a primary school in Westbury is lying listlessly in bed. The future he had been dreaming of, the prospects of studying towards a law degree have been dashed to the ground. He is Coloured, and therefore cannot be admitted to study with the University of the Witwatersrand, a whites-only institution, was the response to his application.

First, it is disbelief that hits him, then shock. He swings between the two with the constant pace of a pendulum as he falls from a great height. Mornings are hard to negotiate. Nights bring yawning twilight shadows that cast spells of insomnia. He wonders about the future in the face of what he calls his stuck-up life, now that he is condemned to a stuffy office with indolent staff. He can't seem to shake off the feeling that despite the limitations of being non-white, he can still be more, do more, and live much more. His mantra 'I want to beat them at their own game', usually spoken through gusts of Lexington cigarette, and the twitch of the upper lip at 'them' expressing marked disdain for the apartheid system.

Patrick wonders about many things, but mainly about his latest plan. From a modest-looking living room on Steytler Road, he is standing by the window peering at what

has been arresting his attention since he awoke. Swathed in morning gowns and slippers long past their use-by dates, Westbury residents collect around the remains of the night that had arrived with the dawn. Yet another stiff. Patrick flips when he learns that it was his friend Mike, the saxophonist, who lay cold on the pavement of Steytler Street. Sandra, Mike's wife, is being carted away to hospital as Patrick arrives. Mommy...mommy! cries George as the ambulance pulls off, his eight-year-old mind unable to comprehend the double-edged pain of loss, his father's absence, and the mother's brokenness. Discordant waves of howling spin out the kitchen door. The scene will loop in Patrick's mind for the longest time.

Perhaps this is what tips the scales for Patrick. Mike was like a brother, how dare he ups and leaves, just like that? Mike's passing on rattles him deeply. Their friendship went back to the glory days of jazz in Sophiatown, before the forced removals broke up the band, sending Khwezi, the drummer, to Kliptown, Soweto. Gee-Man Bogosi, the bass player went back to eMlazi, in Durban. And the last Patrick heard, Sipho, the trumpet player, went to work on the Cape Town docks. A good man with the kindest soul, Mike was, and shouldn't have died. Not like that. Mike died because he was Coloured, Patrick concludes.

The ensuing weeks are sheer hell. He discovers, finally, not without disbelief, the delusion of apartheid's better treatment of Coloureds. When disbelief abates, he finds himself in the vicious grip of disenchantment, rage, and bitterness. He breaks ranks. His migration from Westbury lands him in Bosrand, a backwater settlement and home to a few hundred families of black African migrant mine workers.

Clad in bespoke fancy suits and shod in suede shoes, Patrick is the very embodiment

of big city couture. He is the envy of everyone in Bosrand, and novelty among the boisterous crowds that populate the vibrant undercover joint perched on gritty Gobeni Street. The sleazy joint is run by Nozimanga, a feisty shebeen queen who catches Patrick's eye. Amidst a world that's crumbling down, she is the only pair of stable hands. It will be in Nozimanga's joint where he cuts his teeth at diamond smuggling. It will be here too, in front of a bewildered eleven-year-old boy, where he takes his last gasp.

# Process of making the performance

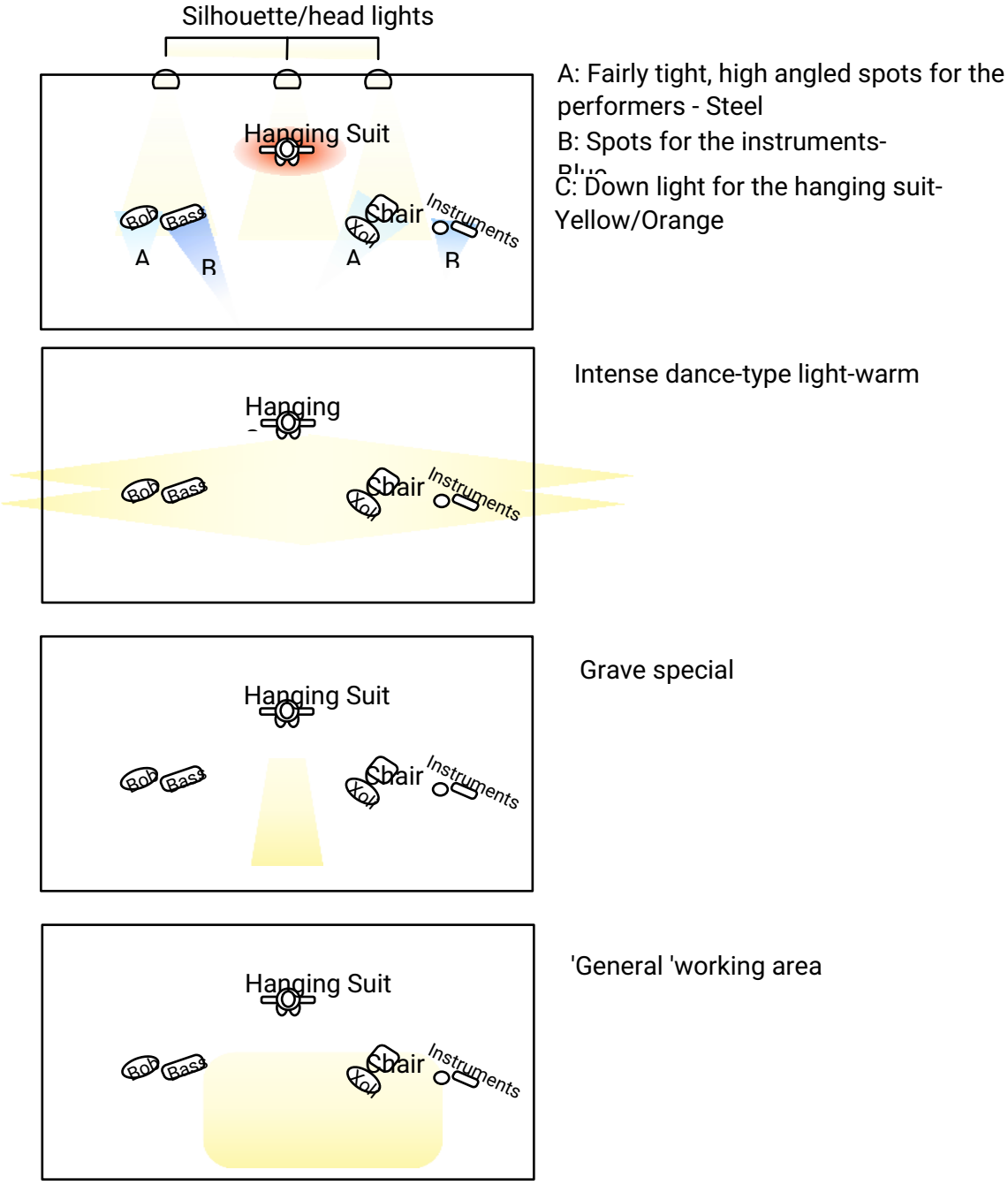
Writing the play was in tandem with my private trumpet and guitar practices. The latter facilitated the writing of the play score. Arguably because a melodic instrument, the trumpet generated a diatonic sonic landscape. Also, church music, especially its reliance on diatonic harmony, marked significantly the formative stages of my musical apprenticeship. I found this a challenge as it was not reflective of the wide-ranging spectrum of my life story, marked as it was by a deep desire to encounter my father through embodied narrative performance.

This aspect necessitated the application of what I have termed 'encounter scoring', elaborated on, on page 26 of this paper. The bass became part of the rehearsal process once we started incorporating music into performance. This aspect necessitated separate rehearsals that were dedicated solely to music.

From the play script, the world of the play was excavated, informing significantly the devising process. Script analysis with the director, who also dabbled as the bass player, facilitated the identification and isolation of the varied time frames, and the

race-ing apartheid geographies that punctuated the performance narrative. As a consequent, the voice of memory, as depicted in the eleven-year-old's narration, was assigned first person status. For this reason, *Volume Please!* emerged as the narrative tapestry of apartheid South Africa, seen through the eyes of a child.

On the page below I provide a simple graphic layout of the lighting and blocking.




The lighting states are meant to isolate geographies evoked through performance.

The yellow lighting is rather faint, unfortunately. However, to clearly see the hues depicted, the reader is advised to lift the screen/page and view it at an elevated angle.

# Program

*Volume Please!*

The Rose Theatre, Edge Hill University, date of performance

Venue, Westbury, Johannesburg, date of performance

# Volume *Please*

A contemporary autobiographical musical set against the backdrop of Black South Africa. Throug
prism of jazz and spoken word idioms, the play journeys through Bosrand, an apartheid ghetto th
holds memories of loss that marked a father-son relationship.

A doctoral research sharing event
Hosted by Xoli Norman
Friday 16 February 2018, 2.30pm TheArtsCentre, EdgeHill University

# Volume Please!

*Volume Please!* is a contemporary autobiographical musical developed with a three-fold aim. First to adopt cotemporary performance practice strategies in a response to a historical musical *King Kong* (1959); second, to engage the subjective autobiographical voice in challenging *King Kong's* performance of collective memory; and third, to create a musical score which locates outside of the traditional musical theatre genre. As part of my doctoral research, *Volume Please!* Will be performed at the Arts Centre, Edge Hill University (UK) in February 2018 and in Westbury Youth Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa in May 2018. My approach derives from a recognition of the radical potential in contemporary performance practice to mobilize strategies for progressive cultural activism. Differentiated from political activism, which is often circumscribed by racial, regional, and ideological affiliations, cultural activism distinguishes itself as radical mobilization of cultural expression for social change. It engages proactive cultural performance strategies as a means to foreground the problematic notion of community in South Africa's racially segregated demographics.

Through performance, I seek to draw links between South Africa's contemporary democratic aspirations that appropriate racially determined neighbourhoods as normative, and counter-democratic forms of social fragmentation espoused in such communities. Beyond its theoretical claims to decentralize power, a nation's democracy is arguably reflected more assertively in the distribution of lived spaces, articulated in the architecture that gives form to its communities, and maintained in the actual social and cultural participatory levels among its varied social groups.

Furthermore, I engage performance in a critique of the enduring colonial/apartheid policies that preclude meaningful social interaction among South Africans. The Group Areas Act of 1950, which legislated the elimination of 'mixed-race' neighbourhoods, was built on the 1913 Land Act which enforced territorial segregation. *Volume Please!* reflects on the problematic relations between democratic practice and apartheid policies whose tyranny prevails in the critical connections between identity, community and nation. To this end, *Volume Please!* is an exploration of how contemporary performance can be redeployed in new formats to mediate in the cultural expression of social discontent.

As an exemplar of such formats, *Volume Please!* foregrounds the subliminal efficacy of enduring apartheid race categories in the inhibition of meaningful social interaction. Consequently, performing *Volume Please! an* autobiographical musical premised on Black and Coloured[1] materials in Westbury - a Coloured neighbourhood historically designated for Coloured subjects - becomes a public act of critical cultural intervention. It draws on the subjective voice of the autobiographical to publicly transgress the Black and Coloured African divide.

[1] (Mixed-Race in South African speak)

## Autobiographical performance musical

The autobiographical turn has been gaining traction in contemporary performance discourses as a viable strategy in negotiating the complexities that confront marginal subjects in their daily social struggles (Heddon 2007, Baker 20: 7; Langellier 2014, Hollow 2009, Uno, & San Pablo Burns, L. M. 2005). As a method of critique, the autobiographical foregrounds generative meanings inherent in our subjective histories, and the multiple agencies that overlap in their construction. It equally instils performance with strategies to reclaim the subjective voice.

Coloured individual voices are often absent in popular South African musicals. For example, in the dominant meta-narrative frameworks central to the first internationally acclaimed South African jazz opera, *King Kong* (1959), 1950s Johannesburg is rendered in distinctly Black and White racial demography.

The opera arguably demonstrates the manner in which cultural outputs implicate in imperial schemata, especially their insistence and reliance on racial difference as key currency in meta-historical and colonizing narrative. Memory, as reflected through *King Kong's* cultural lens, thus propagates historicizing trajectories The autobiographical, as critical performance strategy, aims to recuperate the occluded or marginal subjective voice. It sets out to mobilize marginal social subjects through the use of the Spoken Word poetry, and jazz, as key contemporary performance strategies employed by the marginalized in their daily struggles to agitate for radical transformation.

## Research aims

As a practice-research project this study encompasses a contemporary autobiographical musical, *Volume Please!* and a written thesis. The musical is central to the re-evaluate, through performance, the omission of Johannesburg's mid-twentieth century Coloured identities in *King Kong* (1959) initially, and in subsequent popular South African musicals produced in Johannesburg. My research positions cultural activism as an advocacy strategy and agency for intervention in Westbury, a Coloured community in Johannesburg. As a practice-research project this inquiry encompasses a contemporary autobiographical musical, Volume Please!, and a written thesis. Through cultural intervention, I aim to create a reflective space in which contemporary Coloured subjects can critically assess the portrayal of their identities in *King Kong's* historic narrative, and to share my contemporary autobiographical musical, *Volume Please!*

## Key research questions

What different knowledge emerges when a canonical musical text is re-imagined in a contemporary performance encounter?

- What new notions of identity transpire when contemporary Coloureds critically engage their historicized identities?

What new perceptions do we gain when,

i) The autobiographical subjective voice diverges from popular constructs of collective memory? And,
ii) A contemporary musical is framed outside of the traditional musical theatre genre?

## Jazz and Spoken Word idioms

Jazz and the spoken word serve as critical sites for the amplification of the subjective voice in *Volume Please!* As 'outsider' art forms, jazz and the spoken word have been embraced by marginal social groups as a potent means to speak back to 'power'. Their genesis can be traced to the 1920s African American jazz poetry form which was premised on the improvisational aspect in jazz, and radical shifts in the use of the voice as a mobilizing instrument in performance. Thus the voice assumed revolutionary registers, whose rhythms framed both content and aesthetic forms in poetry.

Contemporary jazz poetry performance styles, however, reflect significant shifts from the ontology of mutual jazz and poetry symbiosis, by deliberately privileging the spoken word and downplaying the entertainment imperative harmony imposed by sonic harmony. I appropriate this strategy in *Volume Please!,* by dispensing with elaborate musical orchestration.

A minimalist approach in spoken word performance aims at significant control over musical harmonies that often undercut oral narrative delivery. The 'popular musical' genre cannot be critically appraised outside the problematic position of individual characters who get subsumed in privileged sonic narratives. If characters are marked by a marginal social status in the world of the musical, their solos glamorize rather than deepen audience empathy. Thus, by rendering the marginalized through rose-tinted glasses, harmony may be seen to destabilize subjectivity.

My approach to the music in *Volume Please!* advances from the premise that often, sonic harmonies either draw attention to themselves, or sweeten an otherwise coarse and disturbing delivery. The resultant alienation of the marginal character from a potentially meaningful articulation of their plight, on the one hand, and their marginal social status on the other, seem to collude in the creation of what amounts to double alienation.

Consequently, in filtering my contemporary autobiographical musical through the prisms of jazz and the spoken word, I also critique the structural patterns and narrative choices prevalent in the popular musical genre.

*Volume Please!* therefore seeks to free the marginal subjective voice from the inhibiting sonic harmony structures that have become synonymous with the popular musical. Framed as autobiography, the play mobilizes memory, re-membering, and individual agency as central vernaculars within jazz and spoken word idioms. *Volume Please!* employs these contemporary radical performance strategies as a response to the notion of nascent democracies that emerge out of mass violation of human rights, of which South Africa is key exemplar. Especially in the manner in which the country's cultural celebrations of memory often elide subjective narratives in favour of grand scale, sweeping accounts of political conquest and historical epochs. *Volume Please!* is a performance argument against the limitations of the epochal narrative framework, especially its reliance on assemblage as a plot-making strategy, with significant omissions of the subjective voice. The play positions itself in the backdrop of South Africa's successive democracies; foregrounds their common burden of the apartheid legacy, and preoccupation to perform its redress.

*Volume Please!* employs the autobiographical to engage South Africa's cultural programs that render memory as exclusive collective experience. Re-membering, therefore, is employed in the play to re-constitute the subjective voice in an otherwise hostile and collectivizing cultural environment. Finally, in *Volume Please!* we are drawn into the world of an eleven year old, and through his lenses, we see 50s Johannesburg come into sharp focus.

Mid-twentieth century Johannesburg delineated itself as a cultural renaissance site. The city throbbed to the pulse of African American jazz, worshipped at the altar of the influential American gangster films, and found respite in the indigenous folk music and dance traditions that thrived among the Black African mining communities occupying the fringes of the metropolis.

Johannesburg's vibrant cultural backdrop and burgeoning economy, intersected to facilitate the advent of *King Kong,* then billed as an 'All-African jazz opera'1. This title, which invoked a fusion of notions of Africa, and European high-art, also asserted Johannesburg as critical site for experimentations with cultural forms of modernity.

*King Kong* captured Jo'burg's hip character. In its modernist representational schema, the 'African opera' jettisoned indigenous choral forms, and revised the advent of 'naive' African miners in Johannesburg (infamously labelled: 'Jim- come-to-Jo'burg') as fodder for the crucible. The opera's plot structure, narrative choices, and song and dance repertoire, have had an enduring influence on subsequent South African popular musicals like *Sponono* (1961), *Manana,* the *Jazz Prophet* (1963), *Isikalo* (1966), *How Long* (1973), *Sophiatown* (1986) and *Sarfina* {1987).

A close reading of the longstanding cultural symbiosis between *King Kong* and the South African popular musical genre, however, reveals blatant omissions of Coloured subjects. It is misleading to conceive of such omissions as the exclusive domain of *King Kong's* racial spectrum, and an index limited only to 1950s Johannesburg. *Volume Please!* maps the pervasive apartheid racist ideology to Bosrand, Johannesburg hinterland.

' John B:acklng ;1980) 'Trends in the s:ack Music of South Afrls3, 1959-19 69' ,: Etizabath May (ed.) Musicals *of Many Cuffures: An int' odl.ldl on,* unrversily of Cali!ornia Press, p. 1 9? .

## Bosrand

Bosrand lies about hundred- and seventy-kilometers northwest of Johannesburg. My birth place and a ghetto punching far above its weight, Bosrand re-emerges from the fringes of colonial/apartheid memory to an imaginary center in my autobiographical narrative. Bosrand becomes a springboard for expressing multiple positionalities, a memory garrison if you will, from which i challenge history's subsumption of the manifold identities I embody. The free forms of the spoken word and jazz idioms amalgamate into performance strategies I employ in negotiating between South Africa's grand race narratives and the private construction of my ghetto identities.

Buoyed by this duality, I re-inaugurate my Black and Coloured (mixed race) heritages within a spectrum of multiple and fluid identities, to contest history's insistence on linear apartheid narratives. I postulate: if African identities have acquired singular meanings in the global and South African historical enigmas - and if these meanings collude in marking the African body as object for policing - then the autobiographical platform triggers multiple narratives, and invokes fluid worlds that subvert such schemes. To perform these fluid identity registers, as viable alternatives to concrete geographies, is my cultural intent and political intuition, performed within the autobiographical framework. Destabilization of the surveillance of African identities is the ultimate goal.

To articulate such complexity is akin to swimming through a viscous stream. It is to meander between timeframes, to alternate, strategically between constantly shifting worldviews. It is to don a jazz attitude.

***Perhaps to swing Between***
***missionary hymns and the blues***
***-***
***It is to recall that:***
***Tt don't mean a thing***
***if it ain't got that Swing'***

*...a ghetto perched askance on*
*the outskirts of Klerksdorp*
*suburbia a nasty asylum*
*eternally floating on a foul*
*stench a*
*tributary forged from*
*rivers of piss, a geography*
*festering on mutilations of a-*
*partheid now turned Black on Black*
*a trocities where children play*
*kgati and skotch among a*
*people tossed about in a*
*storm this kasi bafethu now emerges through*
*my poetic lens to peep through the*
*veil of time in echoes of a*
*thousand distant heartbeats like*
*memories of my father walking the*
*dusty Bosrand streets in*
*brown suede shoes that*
*left in- delible marks where*
*he*
*tripped and fell in love with my*
*mother she a sun-kissed belle*
*he a shamed of his light skin*
*where*
*Black and white paint drip, drip, dripped from*
co
*lonial paintbrushes dipped*
*in Bloody apartheid*
*buckets and*
*dyed him in these high yellow hues*
*that left him dying a-dangling.*
*from a somber ray of blue I*
*saw him die in Bosrand*
*still strapped in his*
*Brown - Suede - Shoes*

# A Note of Gratitude

I would like to extend a special note of gratitude to my supervisory team at Edge Hill University, without whom this work would be an impossible feat:

Professor Victor Merriman,
Your wisdom soars, and yet lands gently upon the corked ears of a fledgling that I am.

Dr Lena Simic,
I want your mind for my next birthday. Thank you for the vigilance.

Professor David Peimer,
For your valuable support I thank you immensely.

To Gary Westhead,
Your kind support echoes in every note.
Stay gold.

Professor Keven Verney,
For all those times I happened in your office frazzled and blue.
Thank you for gathering me.

Of course, Ms. Ruth Carr
how could I forget all the fires you quelled on my behalf?
Thank you much dear.

Professor Steve Davismoon,
Your constant support throughout this journey was immense and much needed, I am eternally grateful.

Professor George Talbolt,
This show would still be in the corridors of my mind had you not stepped in and extended the graces I most needed, thank you kind Sir.

Ms. Michelle Man
Embodiment of the sun, thank you.

Bob Lockwood, bouncing note that bobs effortlessly on a G-string, thank you for your big heart, and the beautiful journey through sound. A big thank you for directing my show and making it stand on tall legs.

Barnaby 'Kingbar' King, your caring spirit and gentle deportment are rare, thank you for being there and staying with it.

Dave Praties, self-effacing sage, you're a delight. Thank you.

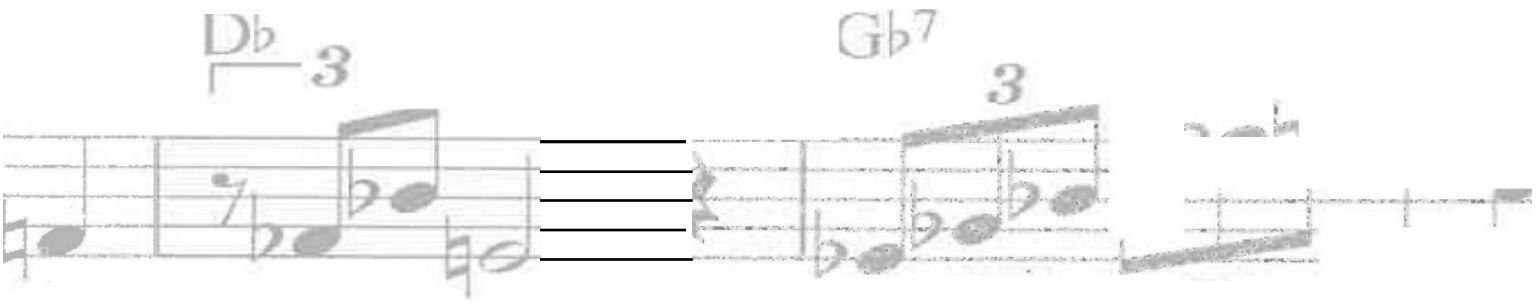
Murray Smoker, thanks for stepping in and rescuing the boat.

Ms Dawn Summerlin, you have touched the show with your magic hands. You are special like that. It all didn't go unnoticed.

Ms Lisa Adams, muse to Rainer Maria Rilke. Thank you.

Ms Clare Chandler, roaming sister, stay Black.

Andy Butler- I think you are the best kept secret on Edge Hill University campus. You're a star through and through. Thank you.



## Bob Lockwood
### Artistic Director:

Bob is a musician, performance maker and digital designer.

Most recently Bob developed a live solo double bass score for *Catmother* by Invisible Thread (formerly Faulty Optic) with Liz Walker and Jonathan Best.

Bob has been co-director of Fishy Tale Company and The Kelman Group, associate director with Sixth Sense Theatre Company, Swindon and Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield and has worked nationally and internationally in theatre and musical performance.

He has taught improvisation, both performance and musical, at many institutions including University of Hudds, University of Leeds, with The Kelman Group, at Gymnasium Raubling, Bavaria and in Portland, Oregon.

## Xoli Norman
### Performer/Researcher

Xoli Norman is a South African playwright, academic, and musician now studying towards a PhD at Edge Hill University. He holds a master's degree qualification in Dramatic Arts from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

In 2008 he won the prestigious SAFTA (South African. Film & Television) Award for co directing *Riemvasmaak,* a four-part television Drama Series which was based on the forced removals of Namibian Coloured communities by the apartheid regime.

In 2002 he won the Olive Schreiner Award from the English Academy of South Africa for writing and scoring for *Hallelujah,* a post-apartheid musical play. He has conducted stage and screenplay writing workshops in Mauritius and Goldsmiths University in London, and has lectured at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and KwaZulu Natal.

As cultural commentator and social activist, Xoli has delivered conference papers at the Goethe Institute (SA), the American Embassy (SA), Bristol University's Black History Month (UK), and the Prague Quadrennial (Czech Republic).

In 2003 he was commissioned by the Market Theatre to write the book and libretto for *Guga Mzimba,* a large-scale musical play based on the life of Gerard Sekoto, a South African artist who lived in post-war France. He is a regular contributor to the annual Besetsana Scriptwriting and Directing Workshops for South Africa's department of Sports, Arts, and Culture.

# Contextualization

## On Performance Encounter

My research interprets activism as a cultural means to critique South African popular musicals. Advancing from the premise that Coloured (Mixed race) identities occupy a marginal status in the South African popular musical tradition, the study employs a revisionist approach to examine the genre. *King Kong* (1959) figures in the trajectory of this genre as the first to exhibit Coloured marginality on stage. I aim to use performance as a strategy to engage with the Coloured community in Westbury, Johannesburg. My autobiographical text as a Coloured/Black African male, titled *'Volume Please!'*, will be employed to facilitate the envisaged performance encounter. This study, therefore, is a practice-led project, which encompasses a performance encounter, a libretto and book for a new musical, and a written thesis.

In the protracted political struggle for democracy, South African Coloureds have identified neither with the white nor the black Africans. (Dissel, A. (1997). Youth, Street Gangs, and Violence in South Africa. In *Youth, Street Culture, and Urban Violence in Africa.* Proceedings of the international symposium held in Abidjan, 5-7 May.

Consequently, they have not benefitted from the political and economic developments of the last twenty years of a new democracy. Research scholarship on the Coloured question has equally politicized Coloured subjects by locating them as residual phenomena bordering the contours of a dominant black African and white minority binary (February, 1983; Adhikari, 2005; Mafe, 2015;).

Re-imagining Colouredness in *King Kong* is a cultural intervention through a performance encounter with a threefold aim:

i. To invite contemporary Coloured subjects in the critical assessment of the portrayal of Coloured identities in *King Kong* (1959)
ii. To apply the results in the facilitation and creation of a present-day musical.
iii. To stage the musical as a form of advocacy for marginal communities in the critical dialogue with key government stakeholders.

This study examines post-apartheid cultural practices in South Africa and maps the marginal positioning of Coloureds in popular culture practices to colonial/apartheid polity. My envisaged practice-led research method entails a convergence of strategies - postcolonial theory (Fanon: 1990; McKay: 1998; Adhikari: 2005; Mafe: 2015), and qualitative research methodologies (Phillips, Stawarski, et al. 2008). This approach seems aligned with the performance encounter research model I have adopted.

Equally emphasized is self-assessment through which participants are allowed to assess the impact of their encounter with *King Kong* (1959), a historic performance text, and the ramifications of its portrayal of Colouredness. While I found these methods (Phillips, Stalwarski, e al.) significant, they also posed challenges with their emphasis on quantitative measurements.

| SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGES 2011 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Language** | **Number of speakers*** | **% of total** |
| Afrikaans | 6 855 082 | 13.5% |
| English | 4 892 623 | 9.6% |
| isiNdebele | 1 090 223 | 2.1% |
| isiXhosa | 8 154 258 | 16% |
| isiZulu | 11 587 374 | 22.7% |
| Sepedi | 4 618 576 | 9.1% |
| Sesotho | 3 849 563 | 7.6% |
| Setswana | 4 067 248 | 8% |
| Sign language | 234 655 | 0.5% |
| SiSwati | 1 297 046 | 2.5% |
| Tshivenda | 1 209 388 | 2.4% |
| Xitsonga | 2 277 148 | 4.5% |
| Other | 828 258 | 1.6% |
| TOTAL | 50 961 443** | 100% |

(Source: http://www.southafrica.info/about/people/language.htm#ixzz1loQND8bi [Accessed 2 Mar. 2017]).


(Source)

I have subsequently elected a mixed-methods approach encompassed within

a qualitative framework. To this end, I have incorporated story-sharing as key in my approach to the performance encounter model. Empirical evidence points to 'story-sharing [as] the reciprocal exchange of relevant stories between the participant and researcher in qualitative research to engage the participant in a genuinely mutual experience that yields superior quality data because of that relationship' (Hayman, Wilkes, et al. 2012).

I am of Coloured descent due to paternal links. My identity, however, is significantly Black African due to my upbringing in a Black as opposed to a Coloured ghetto. My accent and culture perform the inevitable erasure of my Colouredness as a result. To mediate historical and racial divisions that are potentially counterproductive to my research goals, I have incorporated my outsider story into my research design, to facilitate disclosure of my Coloured/Black heritage. This approach is in alignment with 'The use of story-sharing as a method of data collection, a technique used to achieve reciprocity that incorporates the processes of self-disclosure to reveal insider status and storytelling (ST)' (Ibid).

Reflections on Researcher Identity and Power (Mohammed et al. 2015) highlight the inherent challenges within community-based research approaches. Consequently, Community-Based Participatory Research practitioners have recognized the potential for the reproduction of gender, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic inequalities and power differentials within the research process. Academic researchers represent centres of power, privilege, and status within their formal institutions, as well as within the production of scientific knowledge itself. Consequently, researchers may also have privilege and power from their class, education, racial/ethnic backgrounds, or other identity positions. Both of these positionalities, power, and privilege, have the potential for reproducing systemic

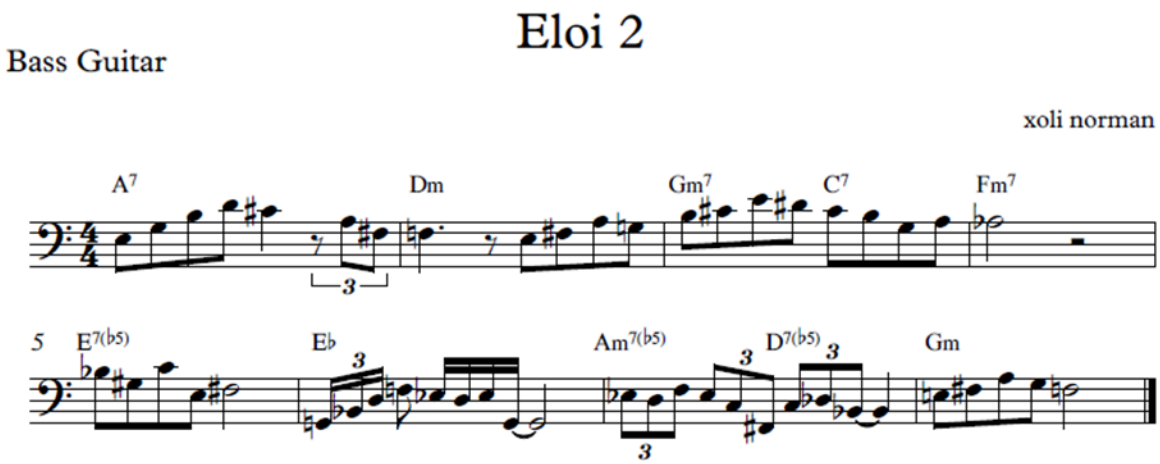
socio-political, and health inequities, thus disadvantaging potential community partnering.

My positionality, therefore, cannot be divorced from how the Coloured community might perceive my gender, race, education status as a researcher, and the politics of status that embed the confluence of this myriad of identities. While these factors prevail, I also invest in story-sharing as an overarching approach to mediate potential differentials during performance encounter processes. Data collected in Westbury; Johannesburg (South Africa) will generate research materials that will inform the writing of a libretto.

The envisaged group will comprise eight (8) adults for each of the thirty (30) workshop sessions. Participants will be at liberty to withdraw participation without disclosing reasons for the effect.

The techniques of Encounter Scoring and Song Narration will inform my approach to data analysis.

- Encounter Scoring is a music composition strategy I invoke to reconstitute linear/diatonic melodic spectra, into broader sonic narrative themes. To this end, the stock of jazz techniques came in handy.



A recurrent sonic theme in *Volume Please!* is Eloi (see figure above). In this composition, the bass guitar melody moves from C7 in the third beat of bar three, to Fm7 in the fourth bar. A diatonic version would employ Fmaj7 to resolve the harmonic tension created in C7, thus C functioning as a (v) of F (i). However, the Fm7 lends a minor (darker) feel to the cadence. But more than that, the minor chord creates further movement towards resolution; the resultant attitude is that of cultural agitation for the meaningful resolution of the negative meanings visited upon the black body. In the extension of the harmony spectrum, the jazz musician protests against the limited possibilities encountered in everyday social interactions by beleaguered black subjects. This compositional technique, predominantly employed in jazz harmony, lends a distinct countercultural quality to contemporary black performance protocols.

Rehabilitating this concept to autobiographical performance entails an attitude of suspended resolutions of identity phenomena. In other words, the musical score embodies the historical tensions implicit in the everyday encounters of marginal individuals and their communities. The desired harmonic resolution, waived in jazz in favour of dissonance, bequeaths musical notation with black socio-political concerns. Jazz therefore, translates to an embodiment of black struggles through time.  In encounter scoring, the music is composed to serve as meaningful cognate of complex autobiographical performance techniques. Devised for the purposes of a practise – research project, encounter scoring distinguishes music as a discrete cultural marker within a complex race-ing social framework, such as exhibited in contemporary South Africa. Consequently, encounter scoring should be seen as a means to delineate Coloured cultural life, an instrumental tool in systematically

creating a distinct identity spectrum from the collectivising everyday social encounters. It is a reflective method aimed at the interpretation of group and individual songs as the manifestation of non-literary features of identity. Songs, singing, and dancing are arguably allegories to group identity. The notion of communal participation in group singing reflects individual consent to identification with others. Kin triumphs, failures, and critical moments of distress and disintegration are in the lyrics that signal the creation of a collective voice.

Equally highlighted in song, are the significant commentary of the dissenting, and, or ostracise individual voice. Recorded sonic materials in the form of wedding celebration songs, funeral hymns, and a secular repertoire informs my approach to encounter scoring, extrapolated herein for the critical re-examination of identity construction and performance politics. It (encounter scoring) also entails the documentation of past, present, personal, and communal sonic experiences that are central to Coloured cultural expressions of identity as a socially determined phenomenon.

The method anticipates the construction of a musical as a critical commentary on how people reimagine their multiple agencies within a shared community. In this sense, the community appropriates the dimensions of a shared space, where human geographies transform the enduring and divisive civic meanings deployed on concrete geographies.

- Song Narration: I experiment with the notion of narration in song, first as a creative device to translate the encounter score constituents from sonic grammar into performance text; second, to critique the pervasive notion of 'community' evoked in collective singing. The first imperative assumes that if encounter scoring predominantly entails the technical rehabilitation of linear/diatonic melodies into

meaningful registers of complex encounters, then the injunction on song narration advances from the empirical evidence of how communal songs, while exhibiting group cohesion via embodiment, potentially eclipse the heterogenous impulse that inform social subjects and their positionalities in autobiographical accounts. The jazz solo technique, whereby the soloist asserts individual autonomy in the height of group sonic cohesion, exemplifies the constant need for individual song narration, where the group chant is open to critical subjective registers. I have extrapolated this jazz attitude in the conception and delivery of performance moments in *Volume Please!.* An example of this is in the boy's recall of an otherwise inaccessible past. He invokes a moment in the past, before his time, when his home was a shebeen, and a hub of illicit homebrewed liquor. He recalls thus:

> I see my mother in a smoke-filled living room where Moruti Phumudi now stands. I see her and she is pulling a dagga pellet from her stockings, a waiting hand releases a stash of notes in exchange for the dagga. In the din of the shebeen noise she is not afraid. In this room full of men and women drunk and beat up, and cussing and…dying. The candle is holding onto a dying flame. A woman in the corner is moaning softly while a man murmurs something to her ear. They are the only ones left. The noise has subsided. My father is sprawled on the sofa, a cigarette stump between his drooping fingers. This is another time. A time whose witnesses have all been silenced.

Outside the drunk men break into song, it is a miners' song:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ke le tshipa | I'm a migrant |
| Ke le tshipa | I'm a migrant |
| He ke le tshipa la ntaba | A migrant of the hills |
| | |
| Ke le kopo kopo kea koposela | A box beat about |
| Ke mabele ke qhalane | Wheat on a threshing floor |
| Ke le tshipa la ntaba | I'm a migrant of the hills |

The taut and scared black faces of the miners filling our house on weekends, men frozen in withdrawals and begging for a spliff, will remain a distant memory.

In the boy's recall, the miners' song, a lamentation of the collective plight of black men, is rehabilitated through song narration, from an exclusively communal theme to refract subjectivity. This deliberate refiguration of the subjective, in an otherwise collectivising sonic experience, demonstrates the methodical disjuncture of autobiographical strategies with the pervasive hegemonic schema, implicit in group identity practices.

Furthermore, song narration is instrumental imagined as strategic schema aimed at subverting hegemonic communication strategies, often infiltrating, and implicated in, popular sonic narratives. Immanent to productions of historicity, song narrative allows for the peculiar articulation of lived experience seldom registered in official versions, and their generalizing patterns. Song narration therefore, seeks to critique the readily accepted notion of homogeneity, as key aspect of the communal, whose embodied through song elide critical appraisal.

# Critical Framework: Volume Please!

Recent theoretical developments reflect foci on the autobiographical turn as an organizing concept in the ongoing struggle between marginal social subjects and hegemonic practices; and the revision of individual positionalities in the popular narrative spectrum. The autobiographical, therefore, critiques the accounts of an otherwise impersonal historical continuum that informs popular narrative frameworks. Bounded on the one hand by the emergent usage of the 'personal'

among historians in their productions of historical scholarship', and the recognition among contemporary performance practitioners that 'autobiographical performers cannot speak for an absolutely unique experience', because 'the reported experience always occurs in a shared world, rooted in the world and inextricable in isolation' (Matthew Hollow, 2009:1; Gingrich-Philbrook, 1997:353).

*Volume Please*! reflects these critical theoretical perspectives in its methods. In the play, I employ my subjective voice as an agency in the re-enactment of my non-official life history.

The text explores ways in which the performance discipline can engage 'disciplinary forms of knowledge production' in its ongoing relationship with history as a form of 'folk knowledge'. (Roth, Wolf – Michael 2012: ii). *Volume Please*!, therefore, theorizes performance discipline as an interpretive method in the investigation of historical patterns that inform embodied 'folk knowledge' in popular performance practices. To this end, I have generated an auxiliary text, a version of *Volume Please!,* conceived for research purposes. It facilitates the examination of *King Kong* (1959) as a historical moment in the South African popular performance traditions, and its relationship with the recurrent patterns of Coloureds (Mixed Races) exclusion from popular musicals.

The *King Kong* legacy as a critical marker of modernity in mid-century Johannesburg has bequeathed to the musical not only an ontology status for the South African musical form, but also a reference point for the genre's thematic concerns. Consequently, subsequent popular musicals like *Sponono* (1961), *Manana*, *the Jazz Prophet* (1963), *Isikalo* (1966), *How Long* (1973), *Sophiatown* (1986) and *Sarafina* (1987), bear thematic similarities with *King Kong*, especially concerning their exclusion of Coloured identities.

If the apartheid social engineering influenced *King Kong*'s significant reliance upon demarcated concrete geographies, the South African musical genre reflects the same attitude to human geographies. Marginal Coloured subjects are a reflection of a black/white African identity paradigm. Its appropriation in the meaning creation strategies that replicate in South African popular musicals has generated a grammar of polarity, from which Coloured identities serve as surplus phenomena.

*Volume Please!* employs performance to advance the ongoing debate on the silent treatment of Coloured subjects in the corpus of popular South African musicals. Volume, in the title, suggests an invocation of a quantity, and Please is a plea to raise the sonic decibels silenced in Coloured narratives. It is an attempt to amplify the muted collective discontent in the Coloured Street patois - 'In the past we were not white enuff, today we are not black enuff'. I should reiterate the critical declaration of my positionality. My autobiographical text emanates from a distinctly black African experience. Consequently, it is informed by materials manifestly differentiated from a day-to-day Coloured subject reality. This invariable, further compounds the immutable race, political, and geography distinctions.

Consequently, as an outsider to the Coloured experience, I set out to highlight through the autobiographical performance model, the pattern of political realities inhibiting meaningful social interaction. To recall Gingrich-Philbrook,

> Autobiographical performers can speak for a particular confluence of shared events and call the others assembled there to witness a pattern, see how one thing resembles another, or recognize how something previously taken for granted by the assembly is not what it seems' (1997:353).

While divisive in its social stratification design, the apartheid phenomenon was also a ubiquitous event. It cut across race, class, and geographies, thus creating a unifying experience for non-white South Africans. I employ my autobiographical

account to mobilize the Coloured community in the witnessing of a seemingly differentiated racial experience. The encounter is a research strategy that seeks to draw attention to the ideological structure of the apartheid experience. Through employing a revisionist approach, the performance encounter has the potential to facilitate assessments of the apartheid ideology, its mechanisms, and its impact as an infantilizing experience.

The ambiguous ideological aspect, therefore - which bequeathed apartheid with tropes of a divisive, yet shared political event - is a legacy pattern that continues to run through the social fabric of contemporary South Africa. This pattern, however, elides detection and critical appraisal because it masquerades as past historical phenomena. Performance encounter seeks to answer the questions that critically embed identity construction and performance. It employs performance to demonstrate the hegemonic alliance between subjective and historical narrativity. Through the encounter performance strategies, individual experiences potentially get harnessed within the group narrative.

Empirical research testifies to the identification of the individual with the group through encounter strategies. Leah Lowe offers an extension on community theatre through her investigation of transformative encounters in the communities ((Lowe, 2005: 121; Pewny, 2012: 278), who reiterates Richard Schechner's performance theory, which appropriates seemingly dissimilar forms of public, private, political and religious rituals into its fold (Schechner, 2004). Emergent data from these research efforts offer new insights into performance politics. They demonstrate the potential in the performance encounter framework to function as a key organising strategy, especially in relation to the mobilisation of individual agencies for meaningful and progressive community advocacy. This framework,

makes the performance encounter more of a political than a cultural project.

However, the implications of Coloured subject exclusion from popular musicals for the cultural spectrum are writ large. In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Fredric Jameson argues against the isolation of literary texts from their political contexts. Concerned with the link between social formations and their generative cultural forms, he insists upon

> the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts, and …conceiving of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods – the psychoanalytic or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural – but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation' (1981:17).

While I recognize the urgency of such a model for the appraisal of cultural products, especially in politically volatile situations, I am cautious of Jameson's essentialist treatment of the political lens. Alternatively, I merge both Gingrich-Philbrook's 'confluence of shared events and Jameson's political perspective to strategically locate my agency within a 'performance encounter' framework. Conceived to facilitate interaction with the Coloured community in the construction of my autobiographical performance, the performance encounter approach serves an overarching framework. Predicated within such a model, *Volume Please!* entails deliberate usage of the personal narrative to redefine class and racially demarcated geographies as sites for radical performance encounters.

While in its generic usage the term encounter evokes chance, unexpected, and/or casual meetings, it is a significantly radical theoretical construct in performance discourse and practice, where it is applied to point to profound personal or communal transformations. Simon O'Sullivan's *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation,* theorizes the notion of encounter thus:

With a genuine encounter…our typical ways of being in the world are

> challenged, our system of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought. The encounter then operates as a rupture in our habitual ways of being and thus in our habitual subjectivities (2005: 1).

The foregrounding of my autobiographical narrative in a performance encounter setting becomes a strategy to demonstrate possible approaches of encountering the self through a critical cultural lens; a means to assess and rupture structural frameworks operative in our daily lives. Furthermore, it facilitates the need to question our collusion with external forces – be they cultural, historical, social, or political - that inhibit meaningful social interaction. Given the marginal status of Coloured communities in the post-apartheid state, performance encounter is designed as a research strategy to explore new ways of being that might emerge from an exchange of personal and communal stories. This approach has informed contemporary critical approaches to community-based research methods, with the acknowledgment that:

> Story-sharing is the reciprocal exchange of relevant stories between the participant and researcher in qualitative research to engage the participant in a genuinely mutual experience that yields superior quality data because of that relationship' (Hayman, Wilkes, et al. 2012).
> Story-sharing will be applied as a complementary strategy to song-narration and encounter-scoring, the two primary research methods in my practice research. Encounter-Scoring entails recognition of music as a key marker in the construction of distinct cultural features that provide a unique aesthetic framework within which Coloured identities find authentic definitions. Exploration of popular music among Coloureds, which incorporates recorded tunes, wedding celebration songs, funeral hymns, and a secular repertoire informs my approach to encounter-scoring. Put another way, encounter-scoring is a research tool that functions to document the sonic landscape of my inquiry. It is the documentation of past, present, personal, and communal sonic experiences that are central to cultural expressions of identity

as a socially determined phenomenon. The method anticipates that the construction of a musical critically comments on how a people imagine their myriad identities through song.

Song-Narration on the other hand functions as a creative device to translate encounter-score constituents from sonic grammar into a performance text. Song-narration therefore should be seen as a strategic sonic schema aimed at subverting hegemonic communication strategies that often inform popular narratives. With the recognition of the centrality of historical materials in ‘folk knowledge’ which inform productions of cultural performance, song-narration allows for a critical reassessment of lived experience seldom registered in official history’s generalizing patterns.

The notion of lived experience potentially ushers in new perspectives on historicized identity phenomena. It becomes crucial to ask as to how might youth cultural perspectives offer different and/or new meanings on identity as a contemporary phenomenon? Furthermore, how might cross-continental sororities affect how the Coloured youth perceive, theorize, and/or perform their contemporary identities?

# Tupac Shakur, Hip-hop, jazz, and Colouredness

If historical narratives reflected negatively upon Coloured identities, how can interventions through a performance encounter elicit new perspectives on contemporary notions on Colouredness? In other words, how can my research approach appropriate youth perspectives that reflect distinct ways of embodying

contemporary Colouredness? Contemporary urban youth cultures exhibit a radical departure from traditional approaches to the notion of story-sharing. Responding to developments in technology, story-sharing in hip-hop and slam poetry has been rehabilitated to revolutionary ends.

If late twentieth century revolutions were predicated on the performances of corporate stories which subsumed subjective voices – for example, Mandela speaking for the South African masses, or Martin Luther Jnr agitating America for socio-political freedoms long withheld from African Americans – Tupac Shakur's autobiographical performances serve as a distinct departure from the tradition of a 'self' occupying a position that overtly speaks on behalf of the masses.

Shakur is important in our understanding of major African American influence upon the development of African cultural politics. Especially in as far as the confluence of his literary and performance frameworks extends our understanding of personal narrative as the index to the articulation of social injustice. Furthermore, the unprecedented popular appeal of Tupac's genre affected the production of rap music as an outlet for inner-city youth. As of 2010, Shakur had sold over 75 million records worldwide, making him one of the best-selling music artists in the world – *2Pacalypse Now* (1991) is hailed by many critics and fans for its underground feel, with many rappers such as Nas (Nas Jones), Eminem (Marshall Mathers), Game (Jayceon Taylor), and Talib Kweli having pointed to it as inspiration' (MTV: 2017). In South Africa, this tradition carries on in the radical works of Kgafela wa Magogodi, and Lesego Rams Rampolokeng.

Tupac's style and content are seen as a provocative response to the limitations of the 1940s jazz Bebop style. Associated with Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, and Dizzy Gillespie, Bebop was seen as a radical African American jazz

movement aimed at responding to the American government's unfulfilled pre-war promises to the black soldiers. The genre captured in a sonic register, the frustrations experienced by the returning African American soldiers facing humiliating segregation and unfulfilled promises. The problem with Bebop was in the structure of the band, whose harmony instruments (the piano and lead guitar) tended to sweeten the intended articulation of collective discontent.

Tupac's autobiographical performance texts place primacy on the spoken word. Herein lies the marked distinction from Bebop structural constraints. Tupac's structural influences can be mapped to the first blues bands aboard slave ships in the black Atlantic crossing. Decided agitation in the slave voice, pitched against the drumbeat as sole accompaniment highlighted the urgency in the message. The howling voice, with distinct repetitive patterns, is the retention of this tradition in the Blues tradition. As Gerhard Kubik points out in *Africa and the Blues* 'The blues as oral literature…have remained somewhat neglected as concerns their African backgrounds in content, diction, and psychology' (1999: 21). The primacy of orality in his autobiographical texts and performances was a re-articulation of the formal tenets of the slave narrative which Tupac used to highlight the plight of African American urban youth.

In his reformulation of personal narrative as a performance site, Shakur merged the politics of concrete and human geographies to produce new meanings that embed subjective points of view in the re-membering act. Unencumbered by harmony, Tupac's structural form radically altered the production and consumption of collective discontent. As a global phenomenon, hip hop arguably owes its efficacy to Shakur's radical dismantling of the traditional structural framework of the jazz band.

*Volume Please!* extends Tupac's structural format in its approach to musical arrangement concepts. The play's score has a generally discordant sound, a deliberate substitute for classical harmony. Musicals owe their popularity to extravagant costume, flamboyant dance repertoires, and harmonious music scores. Within such a structure, music arguably functions as a pacifying agent. Central to this purpose, lies the elaborate orchestral organization which further propagates decentring of the narrative intent, if not sweetening the potentially bitter parts of it.

As a general critique of the traditional role of the music score in musical, I have stripped the orchestra to a bare minimum, by pairing the trumpet with an upright bass guitar in the conception and actual writing of the libretto. This conceptual device is an elaboration of Tupac's band structure, which privileges the spoken word to the drumbeat accompaniment. Within such a structure, hip-hop becomes a radical cultural means to advance the global project, which advances youth discontent with the ongoing legacy of imperialism, which masquerade as progressive globalization.

One of the detailed accounts of globalization is Cape Town-based South African journalist Alex Perry's *Falling Off the Edge*, in which he remarks how pro-globalization pundits cite World Bank stats: 'the proportion of people living on less than $2 a day fell from 67 percent in 1981 to 47 percent in 2004…and conclude this is irrefutable evidence that hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty…however, a rise in a nation's overall wealth says nothing about the inequalities that exist within that nation. "Globalisation might be creating rich countries with poor people", writes Stiglitz (2008: 25 [2006:9]).

Thus, I generalize from hip-hop's critique of globalization to contemporary Coloured youth identification with African American cultural performance

frameworks as a means to theorize intercontinental notions of Colouredness. In *Youth, Street Culture and Urban Violence in Africa*, Amanda Dissel aptly remarks '…In terms of language, culture, and political affiliation, the Coloured youth are homeless, but identify with African Americans, as they are portrayed in popular communication media' (1997: 3). Elsewhere, acclaimed academic and novelist, Zakes Mda, problematizes Dissel's linear Coloured identity equation thus: 'Some of South Africa's Coloured people even attributed their dark complexions to Brazilian sailors rather than to Xhosa grandmothers. They identified more with imagined Italian or Irish ancestors and denied any connection to the indigenous Khoikhoi forebears' (2002: 4).

Dissel's and Mda's legitimate, yet dissimilar views, underscore the complexities attending identity categories, as both respectively highlight performance and desire concerning identity. But more than that, they demonstrate the hinterland of Coloured classification, and how the Coloured identity that cannot be accessed through singular positions of enunciation. To extend Dissel's assertion, if popular African American cultural outputs serve as a reference which invests the South African Coloured with a sense of pride, Mda's contention of imaginary Italian ancestry potentially points to the shame of doubleness associated with Coloured identities.

Identity ambiguity is the notional centre around which hip-hop culture spins its narratives. Reimagined as an evocation of the middle passage, ambiguity becomes the organizing concept which invests the African American Coloured with dual citizenship; Africa as the irrefutable graffiti on the materiality of the body, and America, the slave home to which the African American is bound by a dialectical tie. The phenomenon elicited varied responses to the tenuous political position of

African Americans. The Back to Africa Nationalist movement gained popularity between 1919-26). Spearheaded by the charismatic Journalist, orator, and publisher, Marcus Garvey, who premised his philosophy on the adage – 'Africa for Africans'.

To this end, Garvey bought a passenger ship, whose maiden voyage was scheduled for the repatriation of African Americans back to Africa. Garvey insisted on Africa as the home of liberation for the enslaved African on American soil. Decades later, as though responding to Garvey, James Baldwin asserted: 'I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually' reference. Baldwin's rationale for the sentiment was that his problems, essentially American, could not be migrated to Africa.

As radical cultural expression sounded in the African diaspora, hip-hop carries these contradictions. Its narratives, essentially contemporary revisions of dissent by a dispersed people, cut off from their original culture, language, and continent. From such a perspective, hip-hop reflects a collective desire for the home country. Proximal identification with African American slave narratives, and their fantastic deployment on popular culture frameworks, reveals the Coloured's tenuous positionality in the spectrum of South African politics. Hip-hop, therefore, is herein reimagined as an organizing concept for theorizing transcontinental connections between local and diasporic notions of displacement and Colouredness. It serves as a contemporary extension of slave narratives with which the Johannesburg Coloured youth identify.

Theorizing identity through slavery is not without its limitations, however. For example, as a collectivizing conceptual framework, the term subsumes subjectivity, thus potentially stripping the individual of his/her manifest complexity. While the

contest between theoretical positions and empirical evidence persists, such that diverse meanings of slavery inevitably perform discursive differences. In Tupac's autobiographical themes, these varied meanings are deliberately collapsed in favour of the urgency of political agitation. Thus, the rallying of the global youth voice against forms of contemporary capitalist imperialism defines hip-hop's political centre.

Hip-hop demonstrates how the generative tropes of slavery may inform autobiographical performance with a political mandate. Assimilation of hip-hop narratives into political frameworks spells departure from exclusive concrete geography concerns. It is arguably through the political lens that imperialism is seen as a phenomenon that knows no bounds. Within such a framework, hip-hop facilitates global critiques of imperialism. Its strategy draws attention to the primacy of human geographies as critical sites for complex encounters with the self as a notion redefined by imperial capital interests.

# Practice 1

## Reflections on the Westbury Research Workshops: June – July 2017

*Tomorrow, the 10th of June will be the first day of my research workshops. I am anxious as I walk on the Mandela Bridge, a designer suspension bridge towering over southern Africa's busiest commuter and freight rail traffic that culminates in neighbouring Park station, Johannesburg's transport nexus. Newtown in the foreground frames the enormous skyline of the Johannesburg metropolis. The relics of the nineteenth-century gold rush still punctuate the rhythms of the city. Road traffic noise from cars of all shapes and makes mingles with the incessant ringing of hooters from taxis whose drivers are ever restless for the next load.*

*The spat that plays out on Johannesburg's streets often leads to taxi wars, re-establishing the taxi driver as lord of the road. Johannesburg, Jozi, Mjipa, is like no other city I know. To walk these tough streets takes more than courage. One needs to be vigilant to imminent danger, expect it, and brace oneself to meet it head-on when it calls. Jo'burg streets are a war zone where identities are forged. It takes a steel will to live here, like the taut steel cables anchoring the Mandela Bridge. Aboard a taxi bound for Westbury, I contemplate the process ahead, the complex spectrum of South African identities, and my academic quest to re-situate Coloured identities within this spectrum through performance.*

*We are now in Brixton, cruising along with the High Street's traffic congestion. We are a few minutes from Westbury where High Street will become Perth Rd, a neat fissure simultaneously dissecting and joining Westbury and Sophiatown.*

Sophiatown, a farm plot bought by a speculator, Herman Tobiansky in 1897 and

named after his wife Sophia, became a cultural hub in the 1940s and 1950s distinguished for its proximity to Johannesburg, the relative freedom from regulation by the city council, and the coexistence of Black, Coloured, and Asian cultures which colluded to create what could be called an experimental neighbourhood with a marked sense of social freedoms. Sophiatown's demographic profile, which signalled a unique socio-cultural phenomenon at the time, also afforded its communities relative reprieve from a typical 1950s South African town.

The rapid development of Sophiatown should be seen as a reflection of Johannesburg's flourishing gold mining industries. Coincidental forces in the city's thriving economies and the influx of cheap Black labo on the one hand; and the rural and urban cultural currents on the other, combined to shape Johannesburg into a vibrant political and cultural site. Furthermore, these forces also played a significant role in positioning Johannesburg for experimentation with emergent forms of modernism which characterized modern cities.

In *Imagining the Edgy City: Writing, Performing, and Building Johannesburg*, Loren Kruger observes that 'Johannesburg's turn towards modernism celebrated robust, brash, even uncivil innovation to create what Lewis Mumford called, regarding Chicago, the drama of the 'urban scene' ((2013 :26). Kruger's association of Johannesburg's modernizations with those of Chicago can be seen as a refiguration of Johannesburg through a global lens.

Sophiatown's modern Black image was carved out of the sleek journalism of the *Drum* Magazine. Distinguished for its nouveau sense of aesthetic and fresh interpretation of the African subject in Johannesburg, *Drum* cast the 'new' image of the Black elite in the shadow of modernism. Trends perceived to be 'hip' in fashion, jazz, slang, and politics were peddled on *Drum* pages as distinct signatures of a

breach between Black rural and urban identities. Run by Jim Bailey and a team of Black journalists, *Drum* became an aspirational voice for the 'new' African. 'To ensure that the magazine reflected Black life', Jim Bailey, the owner of the magazine together with a team of Black journalists,

> …established an editorial board that included some of the leading political and cultural figures of the time: Joe Rathebe, Dan 'Sport' Twala, Dr. Alfred Xuma, and Andy Anderson. The board met once a month to generate ideas for new articles. The few staff members at this time consisted of a secretary, Sampson, and sports editor Henry Nxumalo, who later became known as 'Mr. Drum' (*South African History Online* 22 March 2011).

In 'The Girl About Town': discussions of modernity and female youth in *Drum* magazine, 1951–1970, Rachel Johnson critically reflects on how *Drum's* notions of urbanity cantered around the trope of the Black 'modern miss', advancing the tensions that attended the deployment of the female image as both an iconic signature of modernity degeneration (*Social Dynamics*, *35*(1), pp.36-50). What emerges from Johnson's critique is the conceptual ambiguity that alloys *Drum's* representation of modernity in the iconic vernacular of female corporeality.

The journalistic attempt to deploy a female image as the city's iconic image, and the actual patriarchal politics that delineated Johannesburg and its industries as an enclave of White male domination, not only problematize the reading of the female icon within its socio-political context of colonial/apartheid South Africa but invest *Drum's* representation strategies with conceptual incoherence. *Drum's* journalistic experimentation presents a curious problematic in that it is arguably equally true that in the construction of aspirational imagery, journalism wields the power to invoke 'unreal' worlds as a radical means to contest 'real' hegemonic worlds.

For the apartheid state, Sophiatown was an 'unreal' world, a fantastical

wonderland that posed a threat to the nationalist party vision of a racially segregated South Africa. The multiracial image propagated by Sophiatown was counterproductive to the ideals of the apartheid ideology. Jazz proliferation also showcased the intercontinental sonic relations Sophiatown residents forged with Black America. Although seemingly innocuous, jazz was a form of protest music and thus could not be appraised outside of the radical movements propagating revolutionary morals.

Sophiatown was not only a threat to the apartheid state, but it was also thriving outside of the regulatory hand of the city council, and thus beyond the law of the state. It was an ungovernable urban pocket that did not observe The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act, Act No 49 of 1953, which legalized racial segregation. It was thus inevitable that Sophiatown, whilst the dream of Asian, Coloured, and Black communities, it was a nightmare for the apartheid architects. Sophiatown was demolished, renamed Triomf, and declared a 'whites-only' residential area in 1959. Triomf marked the triumph of the apartheid government in the destruction of Sophiatown, the new title was akin to a flag at full mast, signalling the historic forced removals of about 60 000 Black, Coloured and Asian families.

When Westbury, a Coloured neighbourhood next to Sophiatown was left untouched in the forced removals of 1959, and when Coloured families from Sophiatown were resettled in relatively better neighbourhoods designated for Coloureds only, it signalled the sole purpose of the removals and the Native Resettlement Act of 1959 which legislated them: to remove Blacks from the fringes of the Johannesburg magisterial district. The forced removal of the Black populace from Sophiatown to Soweto (South Western Townships), a desolate settlement 20km South of Johannesburg, necessitated justification rhetoric. The formal

declaration of Sophiatown as ‘a Blackspot’ in White Johannesburg captured and articulated a justifiable rationale.

Forever expelled from Sophiatown, a freehold land where they could build houses according to their fancy and financial muscle, coupled with proximity to the city of Johannesburg, made the Black people all the more disconsolate. A deep sense of mourning can still be heard in the dulcet, yet nostalgic tones of the tune ‘I Sophia nge yam’, a tune written by Arthur Molepo for the Junction Avenue Theatre Company’s production *Sophiatown* (1986):

> Sithi yebo yebo yebo (We say yes)
> Sophia nge yam (Sophia is mine)
>
> Abantwana baya khala (hear children cry)
> Bakhalel’ ilizwe labo (crying for a land)
> Elathathwa ngaba mhlophe (taken by the whites)
> Sophia nge yam (Sophia is mine)

Soweto, arid, without toilets, water, or electricity facilities, became the new home for the ungovernable lot.

*I look through the window while the taxi stops at the traffic lights and the intersection of Fuel Rd and Perth Streets. Fuel Rd ushers one into an abrupt and different architectural turf of blocks of unkempt flats whose walls sport coarse graffiti. These flats herald the seemingly humble beginnings of Kretchmer Street, the notorious hub for gang activity after twilight. To the right, if you walked on 4th Avenue, between the Westdene Bicycle Shop and the desolate-looking second-hand furniture shop, and took the first left turn into Ludlow, then walked to 1st avenue, you would eventually cut across Torby, Bertha, Gerty, Good, and Gold Streets, the major landmarks of Sophiatown, affectionately called Softown, Kofifi, Sofia, Casbah by*

*those familiar with Sophiatown's subcultural endearment lexicon.*

*My mind is thrown back in time, to the 50s of Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Thandi Klassen, Dorothy Masuka, Cassey Motsitsi, Rez Mooi, and Tati Mooi. I wonder if these streets still remember these cats, their hip swagger or the indelible marks their nimble paws tried to carve out on the streets of Kofifi, Softown, Sofia. Time is like a hungry wounded monster, slow but ruthless. I imagine the great silence that must have fallen over Sophiatown in the wake of the removals. It catches up with me. I feel the reverberation in its grip as it tosses me, and lodging me into a search for the memory of things never witnessed first-hand. For an eternal moment I am one with writer, actor, and Drum Magazine journalist Bloke Modisane's lament, poignantly immortalized in his last epistle, Blame Me on History (1963), which captured the fleeting, yet the colossal impact of the removals.* '"My mind recoiled with anger and a little with fear, I had not realized the scope of the destruction; it was a wasteland, like a canvas by Salvador Dali...." (reference).

*Bloke's pen bleeds. Its blues drip on my mind like waves of thunder. And I reel. Like a restless wave wary of an approaching shoreline. My reverie segues into the festivities of 1994. Mandela's release from prison. Cut to his subsequent election into the presidency. The series of democratic changes he ushered in. 1997. Triomf annulled. Sophiatown re-instated. I think of the multiple meanings associated with the forced removals of 1959. Of how the removals demonstrated, among other things, the ambiguous relations between the White Afrikaner government and its Coloured subjects. An ambiguity, which, if the truth were told, was never essentially arbitrary, but emanated from manifest commonalities between Coloureds and the Afrikaner: the shared Afrikaans language, cultural traits, and religious affiliation into NGK (Dutch Reformed Church), the spiritual heart of Afrikaner nationalism.*

*I am also reminded of an article I read in my quest to try to get to terms with our complex identities as South Africans: 'South Africa's Coloureds have tended to reject their African heritage, preferring to adopt the language, culture, religion and even family names of their former white persecutors. Most Coloureds speak Afrikaans (a creolized Dutch) and worship in the Dutch Reformed Church' (The Economist, February 4th, 2012. Race in South Africa still an issue: Mixed-Race citizens remain uneasy about Black rule).*

These factors potentially mitigated in favour of Westbury's Coloured community when the Nationalist Party enacted its racist policies in that the same apartheid force unleashed upon the destruction of Sophiatown overlooked Westbury. The apparent affinity between apartheid agents and Coloured communities has not only alloyed Black/Coloured relations over time but is arguably central to attenuated socio-political relations that play out in a resultant peculiar spectrum where both camps vacillate between extremes of fraught and tolerant attitudes.

In general, Black people still begrudge the Coloured for the relative preferential treatment of Coloured communities by the apartheid architects - better housing facilities, proximity and easy access to the city centre, preference for Coloureds over Black applicants on the job market, and better schools, to name but a few. Equally expressed in these factors are the generative attitudes that have become confluent with the South African social history, which constitutes the problematic relations between Black and Coloured communities on the one hand, and between the predominantly Black successive democratic governments and the Coloured constituents on the other.

While the Afrikaner/Coloured ambiguity is significantly reflected in the flux of

appellations deployed upon people of Mixed Races in South Africa: Cape Malay delineating the genealogy of Coloureds linked to the advent of Malay slaves in the Cape peninsula, Khoi-San and iQheya marking relations with Khoi and Xhosa ancestry respectively. These appellations have their colloquial cognates like AK or Amper Kaffir (Almost a Kiffir), Dushy, Bushy, and Boesman. The latter set at best articulates the deep-seated mistrust of the Coloured by his/her Black cousins.

*It takes me about ten minutes' walk from High Street to the Westbury Youth Centre. I bump into Reggie at the entrance, on his way out. He is the vibrant spirit at the helm of the Westbury Youth Centre. Reginald (Reggie) Botha was the first contact I made at the centre, through Coco Merckel, via Vice Monageng. Coco Merckel is an important figure in the contemporary history of Black/Coloured youth relations in the cultural life of Johannesburg. A self- taught speaker of indigenous African languages, fluent in IsiZulu and SeSotho, Coco has thus significantly reclaimed his place in both Black and Coloured sociocultural worlds.*

In *No Room for Squares* (2000), his one-hander play, Coco drew attention to the historical relations between Blacks and Coloureds. In the world of the play, he spoke various South African dialects to contest the stereotypical view of the Coloured subject as one ashamed of his African ancestry. A closer reading of *No Room for Squares* reveals the play's oblique response to *Sophiatown* (1986). *Sophiatown* is about forced removals. The setting was inspired by the urban legend about *Drum* Magazine journalists, Nat Nakasa and Lewis Nkosi, whose advertisement of a vacant room in their house leads to a new occupant, a Jewish girl. In the play, the girl becomes Ruth Golding, and the household is elaborated into other occupants,

Mamariti the matriarch, Lulu, her daughter, and a student.

The play takes us through the last few days before the removals, the ANC's (African National Congress) rallying of the Sophiatown residents around a mass protest against the removals. We get to meet Fafi who runs numbers for the China man, and Mingus, the gangster. Charlie, Mingus' sidekick and the only Coloured character in the play, has no dialogue except the single line 'I am coming with you', uttered to Mingus right at the end of the play. Charlie's Colouredness is writ large especially in a race-conscious society like South Africa.

A strong sense of Charlie's indifference amid a brewing socio-political storm in the impending removals comes across. Furthermore, it potentially propagates the notion of ambiguity associated with Coloured identities. It is this aspect of Colouredness that Coco recuperates and confronts. First, he casts a Coloured male figure, a potentially assertive Charlie, contesting historical interpretations of the Coloured subject in Sophiatown's limited and limiting refiguration of the Sophiatown legacy.

While *No room for Squares* concerns itself with subjective male Coloured representation in relation to Sophiatown, the play extends to the thematic issues in *Drum* (2004) an important film by Zola Maseko cantering on the 50s Drum Magazine epoch. If Sophiatown was a neighbourhood characterized by mixed races, of which the Coloured subject was the quintessential embodiment, Maseko's rendition on celluloid offers a Sophiatown populated only by Black subjects.

In *No Room for Squares* Coco confronts a difficult myth, that Black people have been stripped of all power in the hands of the apartheid apparatus. Conversely, the tie that binds both Sophiatown and *Drum*, reveals the editing out of Coloured subjects from frames of historical narratives. In the hands of Black cultural activists,

the power of representation is wielded towards the marginalization of the Coloured subjects. If apartheid hegemony regulated freedoms afforded to its subjects, its unintentional effects can be seen in the enduring discriminatory attitudes in the politics of representation.

*No Room for Squares* was an important representation of a difficult dialogue between Black and Coloured subjects. But more importantly, the work highlighted the power of the stage as a platform for contesting, reconstructing, and rapturing identity. In a social landscape marked by pervasive and enduring racist divisions, Coco represents the power of reflective performance in contesting the social value of language and bodily presence as essential markers of identity.

Vice Monageng is the award-winning young Black playwright and cultural commentator from Soweto. His latest work *Ankobi* (2017) which I saw at The Market Theatre, was a bold interpretation of the current state of South African politics.

Evoking an imaginary world of the Khoi San through the application of indigenous Khoi San musical instruments, music, and costume. Vice recreates the subjugation of the Khoi San people by a new religious order that promises unprecedented powers. When Xoi, the protagonist, resists the intrusion, he is taken on a journey of a series of deceptions. What emerges is the game of politics in which Xoi loses both his name and social status.

*Ankobi* is a curious experimental work whose critique of the South African politics through the use of an imaginary Khoi San performance framework is writ large. The notion of politics as play and the immersion of such play in a fantastic world evoked in the Khoi San themes, the performance forges a stark contrast between the tenuous social positioning of the historical Khoi San subject and the

contemporary black masses. Furthermore, the performance of a historical phenomenon, its semblance to contemporary politics, and the imaginary world out of which the performance develops, collude to create the distance necessary to ignite both estrangement and familiarity.

As in all works of significant art that resonate beyond their immediate spatial politics, I also read into Vice's *Ankobia* the narrative of the contemporary Coloured subject. More so given the centrality of the Khoi San, whose progeny is decidedly embodied in contemporary Coloureds.

I first met Coco around 1998, and Vice around 2000, at the Market Theatre Laboratory, an experimental drama school for Johannesburg's young cultural enthusiasts. Coco entered the predominantly black African academy wielding the marked skill of African vernaculars. It dawns on me, almost from below the threshold of logic, how Vice's intrigue with the Khoi San coincides with my search for a lost Sophiatown where both Black and Coloured worlds coexisted. Unbeknownst to me, between Vice and Coco, would emerge a lead to Westbury Youth Centre, and Reggie Botha, its generous capo leader.

After I had shared my research project with him, Reggie introduced me to the rest of the team and gave me his blessings and access to space. Today I am embarking on the final preparations for tomorrow's first session, final checks on the workshop venue, and the confirmation of participants' availability.

# Workshop Structure

Westbury's Coloured and Black young adults from Soweto participated in a 5-day workshop structured in the following manner:

## Phase 1

INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS (10)

INTRODUCTION OF THE CENTRAL IDEA OF THE WORKSHOPS: A CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL FRAMED AROUND THE FOLLOWING THEMES/QUESTIONS:

- How Johannesburg shapes our identities on a day-to-day basis.
- What new identities emerge when we interact on the stage of the city, as differentiated from the roles circumscribed by our neighborhoods?
- How do we understand Johannesburg beyond the concrete city? For example:
    - Ways in which the city influences how we define ourselves
    - How might these definitions regulate our relationships?
- What benefits and drawbacks come with living in and around Johannesburg?

Participants explore a given theme/question to explore in pairs. In the case of a duplicate theme/question, the pairs would form a bigger group for a further assessment.

## Phase 2

In pairs of two, participants are assigned action tasks based on the themes explored earlier. For example, if a pair/group explored the theme of 'what new identities emerge when we interact on the stages of the city'.

The action task could be a scenario in which two strangers meet because the one might be lost and asking for directions from the other.

The action task progresses to a Group reflection session.

## Phase 3

Introduction to the text of the musical *Sophiatown* (1986)

A brainstorm session on what the text tells us about the way of life in 1950s Johannesburg

What are the similarities or differences with our way of life in contemporary Johannesburg?

## Critical reflexive response

The following is a summary of the workshop process and progress or lack thereof.

On the first day, I suggested we take a tour of Westbury for an hour or so. This was to familiarise the Black participants from Soweto with the lay of the neighbourhood, and my reaction to a remark by Solomon Maseko, one of the participants from Soweto, that he had never been to Westbury before. Jason, the guide and participant

alerted us to the high crime rate, precipitated by the prevalent gangster activity in Westbury, and that he would facilitate engagement with the residents who are wary of strangers.

The tour was a revelation on many levels. Firstly, the cultural differences between Black and Coloured residential areas were immediate to a point of turning the participants from Soweto into spectators. Emerging from the encounter was a view of Westbury through a non-familiar Black lens, it was an 'exploration [of] the different histories written in urban space - from the official and the historical to the personal, the mythical and the imaginary'. Simultaneously discomforting and fascinating was the witnessing act of watching Westbury, a Coloured neighbourhood cum 'real' life installation, where its residents were seen to be performing Colouredness.

Notions of forced entertainment and the inevitable problematic relations engendered in the act of spectatorship formulated into one curious question: what happens when we realize that our lives are nothing more than mere characters and our neighbourhoods predetermined colossal sets from which there is no escape? These palpable differences carried into the workshop space. The question of language, for example, came to the fore as participants used English as a medium of communication in a predominantly Afrikaans speaking community.

In a different setting, Westbury youth would alternate between English and Afrikaans; and the Soweto youth between English and African languages. Furthermore, the usage of English also carried resonances with the colonial legacy into the workshop space. While English served as a convenient arbiter in the communication among participants, it also highlighted status differentials among the participants, an essential marker between those who were conversant with the

English language, and those who were not (especially among the Soweto youth).
I thought the language difference factor played out in Solomon's participation levels. For example, when engaged in action tasks, which required no language, Solomon would give optimum participation, which waned during discussion/reflection sessions. While the language may have been an issue, something deeper surfaced when he shared with the group. 'I have heard stories about Coloureds, that Coloureds are lazy and drunks, and I believed what I heard...but what I have witnessed in these workshops is different from what I have heard…about the Coloureds.

Now I have a different perception of who the Coloured people are'.
Upon reflection, I realize that I could have rechannelled this moment of revelation into the process. However, this was a different subject, which was expressing a need for and perhaps expressing some form of catharsis through projections of the Coloured stereotype. My workshop plan initially, and the envisaged musical eventually, were premised on an amalgamated Black/Coloured imaginary world for performance.

'Coloured youth development is at a stalemate because of lack of government funding', opined Natalie from Westbury.

Her statement was two-fold in how it was an indirect response to Solomon's earlier comment, secondly, although enunciated as individual opinion, it inevitably voiced the collective Coloured discontent. 'At the centre of the problem', she went on to say, 'was the Coloured surname on the funding application forms. Implied in Natalie's concern was the problematic of nomenclature associated with Coloured titular identities. For Natalie, the Coloured surname was wrong for the predominantly black African government appraisal schemes.
The subtext to Natalie's commentary was the dreaded elephant in the room. It

expressed the structural flaws in the government's development programs that sought to redress the apartheid imbalances. Chief among these was the (BEE), Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) program - a racially selective program launched by the South African government to redress the inequalities of Apartheid by giving black (African, Coloureds, Indians, and Chinese) South African citizens economic privileges that are not available to White South Africans. however, despite its noble inclusive claims, the program was decried for its black exclusive execution.

Inferred in Natalie's statement was that the imaginary world we were exploring in the workshops – one of the collapsed boundaries between Black and Coloured Africans living in Johannesburg - was in complete variance to the 'real' world governed by politics of right and wrong identities. The differences in the group reflected forms of 'Othering' brought by the participants into the workshop space and process. The concept of 'Othering' emanates from De Beauvoir's (1949) extrapolation of Hegel's conception of the dialectic captured in his Master-Slave Dialectic (1807 B.IV.A).

In general terms 'othering' is entailed in the process of casting a group, an individual or an object into the role of the 'other' and establishing one's own identity through opposition to and, frequently, vilification of this Other. The emergent notion of 'Othering' deflated the primacy of the workshop themes which were gradually replaced by the transformation of the workshop space into a site for catharsis. This aspect is crucial as it signalled the overdue need for healing, characteristic among people groups who have suffered mass political violations and divisions. Although the majority of the participants had not witnessed the apartheid system, they seemed to embody its pain nonetheless, which was a curious phenomenon.

The change in the content and dynamics of the program attest to the enduring political content that pervades cultural processes. What was emerging in a cultural process was the deep identity anchorages in political worlds. It was thus almost inconceivable to address the questions of my research without constructing a cultural-political framework within which the participants could function. I might have reiterated the framework of my research, but it might have come across as minimizing the pain in the room in favour of the research aims and objectives. The resultant stalemate also immersed me in a protracted and significant moment of reflection and deep learning.

## Reflection

The workshops have made me realize that my ambition to create a contemporary musical, where Coloured identities are redeemed from the obscurity characterized in popular South African musicals, seems rather ambitious, especially given the identity dynamics that played out in the form of preconceived perceptions of the black and Coloured African 'other' in the workshop space. Manifest forms of 'Othering' in the workshops only reflected the micro dimensions of fraught relations between Coloureds and Blacks in South Africa.

The ideology of 'Othering' also captures our limited scope for self-definition, which invariably relies on seeing oneself in relation to others. While the concept of 'Othering' may take various forms, in nascent democracies where political and race affiliations are contested terrains, 'Othering' also encapsulates appraisals of self and others through political and racial lenses. These dynamics equally reflect Johannesburg's social landscape.

Equally daunting would be the attempt to articulate through a musical format,

a collective Coloured restlessness within the spectrum of South African identities. Without seeming to underplay the apparent culpability on both sides, I came out of this experience with a sense of heaviness, one borne out of a deeper understanding of the contemporary Coloured patois: 'in the past, we were not white enuff, and today we are not black enuff'. The seemingly innocuous joke masks, I suspect, a cry belted out from the bottom of the identity food chain.

The autobiographical turn, therefore, becomes a response to the apparent stalemate. *Volume Please!* is a creative contribution to the ongoing South African Coloured story. In *Volume Please!* the censured plea to raise the decibels of collective Coloured discontent, is migrated into subjective dissent, turned up to maximum volume, without permission.

# Practice 2

## Reflections on the Performance of *Volume Please!* at Edge Hill University (February 2017)

The stage of the show *Volume Please!* is predominantly bare. Stage lights reveal a suit and hat suspended upstage, musical accompanist Bob Lockwood strumming on the upright bass down centre stage. Next to Bob is a chair, a trumpet and guitar on stands. If the orchestral structure is stripped down to the barest minimum, so as to make room for the voice, the stage reflects the same concept on a visual plane. Thus the world of the show emerges from the suggestions proffered in the spoken word. The seemingly over privileged spoken word emanates from the urgency to tell the South African Coloured story.

The play has the Edge Hill University community, mainly students, as its audience. It is an interesting encounter which inevitably leads to essential questions of content, audience, geography, and the relationship stimulated in these dynamics. The type of questions triggered by the show for its audience also comes to the fore. For example, after the show Bob and I were invited to Lisa Adams-Davey's class that had just seen the show and wanted to ask questions. Student reflected that they always thought the history of the political struggle in South Africa was predicated on a Black/White polarity. Of course, the play would receive a much more nuanced reading from a South African audience. Mostly, I found the Edge Hill student audience reaction interesting in that people were mainly at a loss as to how to react to the play.

For me it was a culmination of not only a major journey of the practice aspect of my

research, but also a breakthrough in dealing with the forces at play in the construction of my identity. The irony, I found, was that I could find the objectivity of such a reflection away from South Africa. I am not sure if *Volume Please!* could be conceived in South Africa, at least not in the same manner. I say this out of a hunch for a realisation that distance seems to take us away from the things we write about but also equally rewards us with intimate clarity.

Feeling, I mean really allowing oneself to feel, has a lot to do with space, with geography. If imperialism had carved out pathways in the sea, in a wild search for some respite from the cold unforgiving North – and thus docking on sun drenched beaches, in Africa; then it was upon those same furrows I traced my path to redemption. only I flew there, to thaw out in the cold breeze that carried my breath back to the North Sea, and the Thames River, and the docks of Liverpool; where many a bonded men aboard slave ships had looked back through woebegone eyes at the receding island.

What weight it all brought upon my every step? What inward seas crashed and beat about in my chest while I thawed out in the cold? I dare not articulate the respite and the pathos that took place all at once. For a moment I was a man. I felt it. And I could speak. Then it dawned on me, with divine clarity, that the only black men and women who trod these streets, demanding respect while at it, Spoke – through horns, ivory keys, and paint brushes dipped in their very blood. And if I were to learn anything at all from it, it was that I would have to find something in my past to negotiate the future.

There was everything damning about being African in the diaspora, and yet there was also something special. The latter had to do with not responding to the

forces that crushed one, but to tear out of one's being, a specialness, a form of currency. And what was mine? I would use the trumpet as a means not to respond to everything that had brought me thus far. But to speak. I was resolute, from then on, to speak. My life story. I realised how, the ability to speak, to really speak, demanded feeling, and feeling, vulnerability. So, I plunged deep in.

It was one thing to write the world of the narrative that eventually amounted to *Volume Please!,* and completely another, to embody the emergent worlds that inform Bosrand, the principal world of the play. It was not only physically demanding, but also emotionally draining to exhume and speak to the dead, my father and mother, whom I remember as buoyed by the pulse of life, my only weapon against the truth of their decay. To populate imaginary Bosrand with their narrative as though they were still alive is manifestation of my memory, wielded as weapon against time's steady, ruthless, and silent steps.

The musical score is written to reflect on these complex themes. *Eloi, Morning Prayer, The Cross,* and *Mercy* make up the four major pieces that punctuate the play's narrative progression. There was an attempt on my part to premise these musical compositions on the half-diminished mode for its very dark sonic hue. Added onto this aspect was also the use of minor chordal cadences approach, which for me delivers a symbolic spatial treatment of melody. All these dynamics were employed to tone down the harmonious, sweet, and entertaining melodies. The structural edifice of my music score was constructed to render a sparse sonic landscape, aimed at a gnarled sound, reflective of the nostalgia and identity discontents central to the play. In rehearsal the development of the score was curtailed once Bob took up the gauntlet of a directorial role. I began missing the bass accompanist that he had been until then.

In conclusion, the performance of *Volume Please!* in Ormskirk cannot be appraised outside of the limited rehearsal spaces, access to the performance venue. The performance also marks another step in the development of my research. I look forward to how it will be received at The Florrie, in Liverpool, and later on in Westbury, Johannesburg.

Script

*Volume Please!*

# *Volume Please!*

By Mxolisi Norman

## Characters

Narrator: Xoli Norman

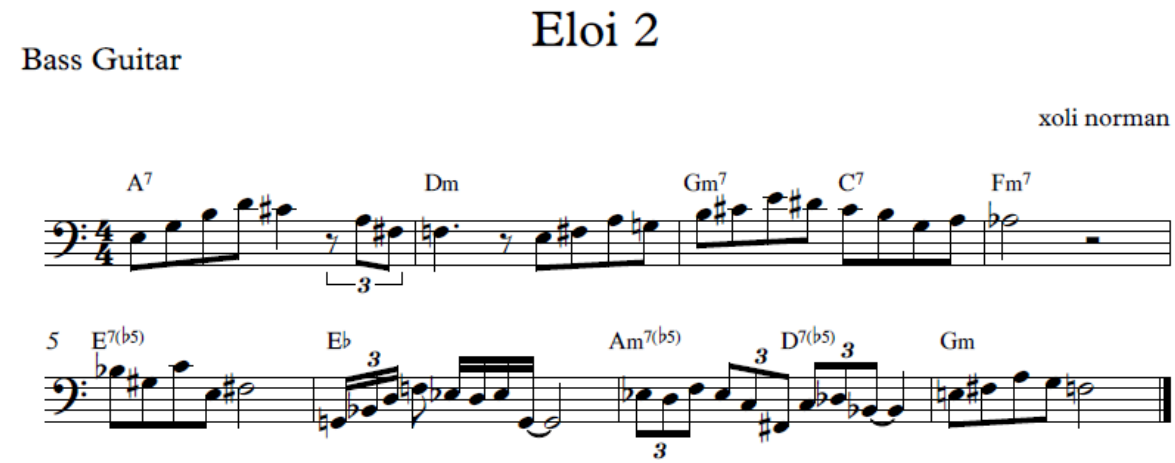
## Musicians

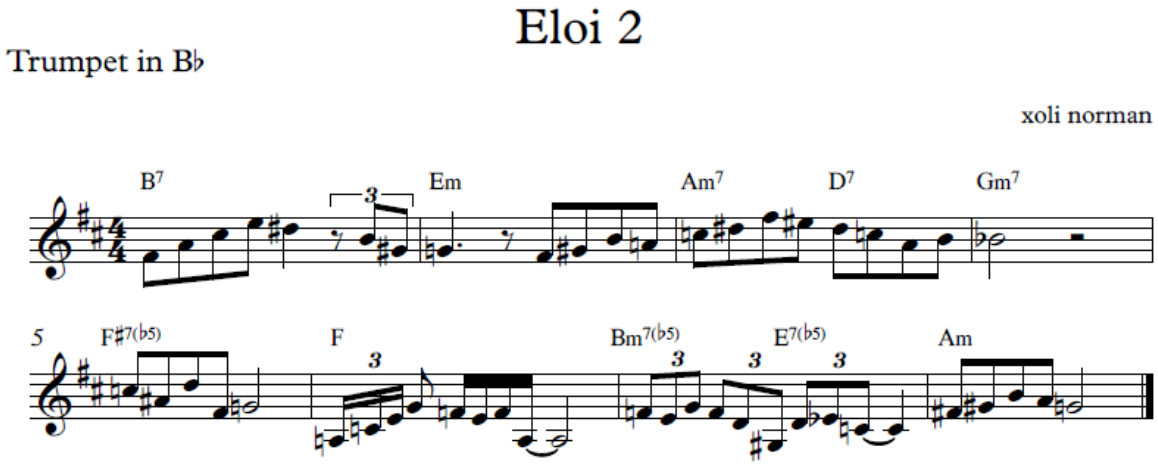
Upright Bass player: Bob Lockwood

Singer, trumpet and guitar player: Xoli Norman

## Opening

*In the dark we hear the bass solo playing **Eloi,** tentative at first, like spinning a broken web of sound.*




*Soft light falls on a Stetson hat and a 1970s pinstriped suit suspended on a hanger. Directly beneath it a pair of brown suede shoes stick out. From backstage the sound of a muted*

*trumpet cuts through. After a while the trumpet sound halts, leaving the bass to continue **in pizzicato** underneath the following text.*

sit 1

Lx

(*Conversational, still from backstage)* I first encounter myself in what seems like…a mad dream. I'm in Bosrand, the dusty ghetto and home to a few thousand black families. In them I see myself. At home I speak isiXhosa, in the streets I shift between Setswana, SeSotho, and IsiZulu. Later, much later, I am confronted with my Colouredness, my Mixed Race heritage. It is…awkward. The man I have loved all my life, has just died.

Stand

I saw myself -

A million broken pieces

Hurled to a fate with skies stretched far

Would learn fast

That I

the undesirable

was object of policing

I was nine

Black, Mixed…confused

Full of questions

Empty of answers

my life

in one word

Vertigo

**Bass stops**

Shock, confusion, and emptiness lodged in my chest. I was catapulted into a different reality which can best be described as being suspended from a brittle string of fright. My Bosrand turned into a violent abyss churning black bodies. To this day I can still hear their wailing, a disconsolate litany against the whims of history. A history of being stacked like sardines into tin shacks. Who was I in this…sea of madness? What kind of sardine was I? Black, Coloured, Mixed? What would it take to catch me? And what scheming angler waylaid me? I wondered.

**Bass: glissando**
**(**stop/start)

These questions were thrown at me with the velocity of a meteor and landed with dazzling light at intervals too frequent for me to summon the courage to revolt. Thus I decided to carry it. This…thing...this…doubleness…nameless and…awkward. This thing so synonymous with my being.

I carried it

Through the rain

On sun blasted days

Those nights I hated it most?

I carried it

On my back

On my breath

On my skin

More out of a realisation that I had been betrayed into a paradox for a body;

Repulsion and charm

black and yellow genetic fabrics

Stitched seamlessly together

Hiding a treacherous genesis

leftovers from a sinister colonial abattoir

blighted history pages mask

a bloody butcher's table

**Ooxam song**

I carried myself like an awkward pastiche. A semblance of what might have been, what I could have become...tried to get familiar, with this dead-end avenue, this…

predicament

Muffling a thousand possibilities

Layers of a self

Screaming to be set free

Only it did not dawn on me then, that I was stuck in a groove; always moving round in circles; always on the lookout, for a way-out.

**Trumpet & Bass** (freestyle)

Detour ahead

Skirt around the world

Make yourself invisible

A signpost

to fantastic destinations

You've never been

never seen

An outlaw

From the outskirts

Embodiment of taboo

Marking the borders

**Bass stops**

But nothing remains the same for long.

What I signal quickly morphs

Into psychedelic patterns

Gathers new meanings

Beams broken equations of…

…migration

Every gaze falling on me

**Bass Harmonics**

Gets the contagion…bleeds

…screams, plunges into

this irreverent
bastardly abyss of blackness
Where profanity copulates with pious indifference
and my rhythm eludes algorithms of

…peeping toms and gawking god-divas
I'm a full-blown…positive…lewd spectre
Now gesturing to something…
…more pristine

A gentle answer
to damning questions
all the more brutal
because unuttered

a blemished smile
forged in the hell fires
Of a colonial dominatrix
Branded in phony fast food democracies
Only in exile
I trudge the streets
Of a paradise lost

But then again…

What is paradise?

If not that special perplexing yearning
For an escape?

Paradise is…

…stolen continents

That will never return

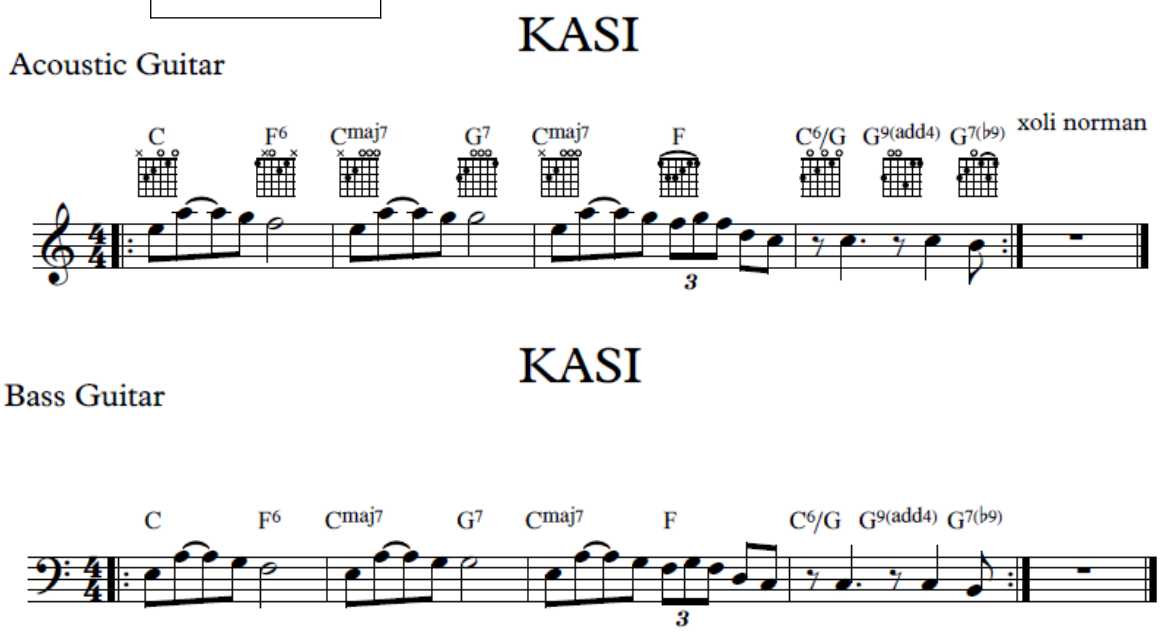
And if they ever did

They would be broken

Beyond recognition

Xoli sings as he fetches the guitar

**Kasi (duet)**




## 2

Like those who came before me, now trapped in tin shacks of shame for a home. I also discovered that my life was cast in a sinister scheme long before I began to live it. In such a scheme, I had to improvise, create a fantastic act out of a baffling performance. My life. My doubleness. Upon a stage framed in vague settings that turn me accomplice in the act of metonymies that only echo who I am. To the resounding applause of progressive distortions that now stand as insignia to my mixed race identity.  And now…

I am the I -

…dentity contraband a ra-

ce-ing joke an e-

xistence marked in

Bold whimsical strokes of a

brush saturated in

mixed hues of bi-

ology I am the in-

carnation of the subaltern the

eerie dance between dawn and

Twilight I am the

yellow stain on your noc-

turnal fan-

tasies the dark blemish on your

lily white parades every time I

want to speak it in-

intercepts me it pre-

cedes me em-

bellishes with supreme in-

genuity my

stubborn stillborn utterances

I am the I-

dentity

contract

banned

**Bass stops**

These complex conundrums that colluded with a biological betrayal, made me realise - not without a peculiar pathos - that I could not candidly deal with life, without confronting the big question that mine had become.

Self-interrogation

Collision with this racializing reality

The inescapable prison of my mind

Implicated in the phobias fermenting in the global pot

Religion

Race

Fake geographies

False histories

So, I set out to confront the world. Or so I thought. It was me I came face to face with. Still clutching narratives that helped me summon the courage to navigate the streets, without which the nightmare a black life, the masquerade for this double existence inferno, would be impossible to survive.

| **Bass gliss** (beater) |
|---|

| Lx | Sit |
|---|---|

I could find a haven in Alabama – not too far, just beyond the hill next to the graveyard. Yes Alabama, the Coloured suburb. But naah, I would stick out like a sore thumb there. How can I even begin to speak like them? Fancy white folk accent? Some Coloured children come to Bosrand to see their relatives you know. They walk past Gobeni Street, here, our street, and then turn into Phakamile road. We stop the ball game and watch them.

The girls playing kgati, jumping in and out of rope hoops, stop to watch the visitors from Alabama. What are they thinking? Me, I am wondering why THEY can't play with us; why WE can't live together. Lota and Nkosi, my friends from Phakamile road, always tease me and call me WHITEY because of MY fair skin.

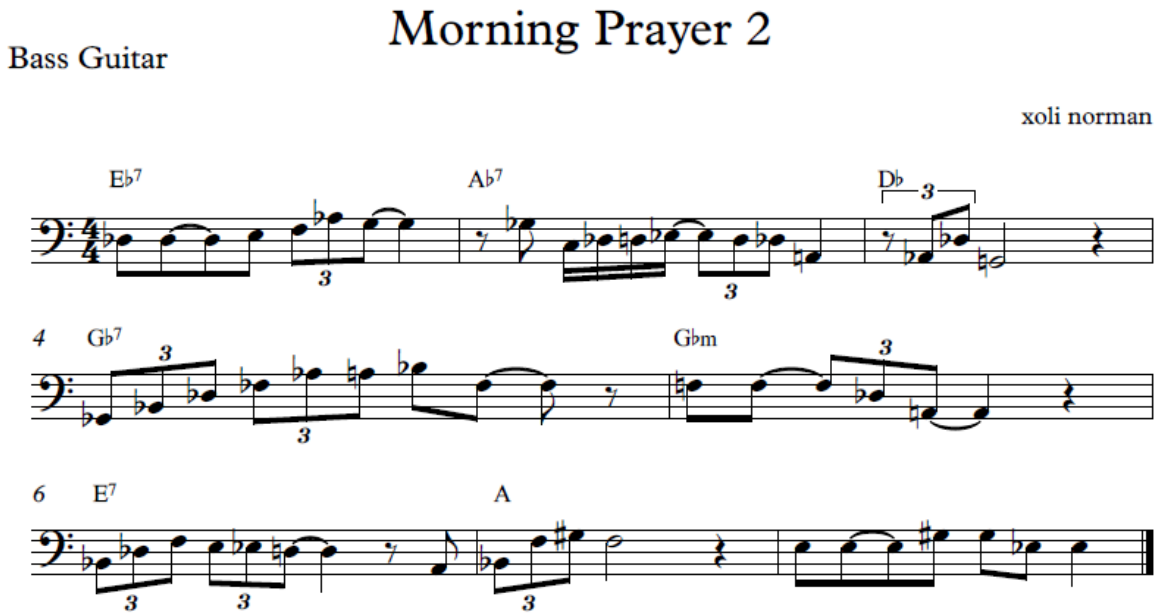
I look at myself, and then at the Coloured kids wearing fair skins and fancy clothes. My fair skin turns black. And it screams many things. Many things…My heart starts to race, it beats faster and faster. I feel like running away. Away from Bosrand, past Alabama and the gold mines, past South Africa, away from mama Africa. I'm floating on a cloud, above the world. Everything sinks into a bottomless hole, becomes small, and then turns into nothing. I'm laughing, like I've never laughed before. And it echoes through the vast skies.

| **Bass gliss stops** |
|---|

| Lx | Stand |
|---|---|

In the face of seemingly irreconcilable contradictions, I chose my life. I chose it as a singular rebellion not only against those who constantly assessed it, but even against myself. If it was mine through betrayal, in choosing it all over again I transformed it, I hoped, into a vital currency. Perhaps armed with it, I could obliterate traces of bitterness. The bitterness of being mixed in a black and white world.

Tpt & Bass: Morning Prayer




## 3

Patrick. My father…

*Pause.*

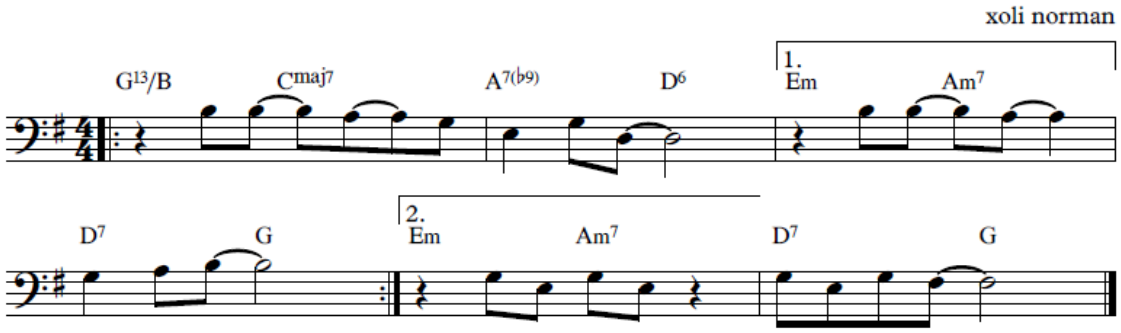
…played Marabi jazz in the 50s, a 1930s slum invention.

Guitar & Bass: Marabi Jazz

Bass Guitar

# Marabi Jazz

xoli norman




But when the Gestapos abducted him to a dilapidated building downtown Johannesburg, bent on cutting off his fingers, an ordeal he miraculously survived, he turned his back on the piano.

The Gestapos and the Berliners were ruthless gangs that governed the ghetto streets of Johannesburg. Their names betrayed admiration for Hitler's senseless brutality. The Berliners imagined themselves as outlaws prowling Germany's city of Berlin. The Gestapos '*Geheime Staatspolizie'* or 'Secret State Police', a ruthless bunch, they prided themselves on aggression. They typified Nazi Germany secret police force. But if truth be told, these radical titles only masked the black man's darkest desire: to obliterate the white man from the face of mama Africa. Isn't it funny how black men borrowed names from a bunch of white men in Germany to express their hatred for each other?

**Bass stops**

Those who did not join the gangs swelled the ranks of the ANC – the African National Congress and the PAC - the Pan Africanist Congress,

I Afrikka Izwe lethu!

I Afrika Izwe lethu!

Gerila gijima!

Hayi! Hayi! Hayi!

Eitha! Tha! Tha! Tha!

Political movements for a revolution. A revolution to cut loose the white man's tenacious grip on the gold mines. Now that's another story. The gold mines.  For now let it suffice to say it was on these mines that black boys turned into bitter men.

**Sparse Bass harmonics**

They lived like mole rats, descending into the belly of the earth at the crack of dawn, and clawing their way up at twilight. Come weekend, rivers of booze flowed among and inside black bodies. They danced and laughed, fought and killed each other. Something more sinister than the utter desolation of the mining experience drove them to it. And they dared not speak about it. It was that empty look in the eyes of their women. Castrated them. Something they knew too intimately from balls crushed over and over again in the ever tightening grip of the Randlords, the imperial foot soldiers.

The Randlords, the queen's gang. Knighted for siphoning blood money from Johannesburg to Englland. Johannesburg…the bridge built on blood spilt in ruthless gang wars. Black boys and white men fighting in gangs, fighting under different banners. Fighting for gold.

Zemk' iinkomo magwala ndini

Nilele nje siphalel' isizwe

The land is in the hands of strangers

Abantwana bafile yindlala

Ikati ithe natya eziko

Aphi na amadoda enene?

Baphi na oo Bambatha, ooNxele, oo Shaka,

Sasinga lotyolwa ngee nkoma na mawethu?

Kwathini lento sesilanda izisu ekomponi

Usilahlile kusini na uMdali?

We await patiently

The return of our men

From the dark holes of Johannesburg

Goli ndini akunaluxolo

Goli ndini usisi hange

Uthule nje kant' udyobh' amadoda ngedyem yesono

Goli ndini usisi helegu

Uth' ukude uyihlakazil' imizi

Ubashiy' abantwana bezintsali

Goli ndini usisi qalekiso

Sisifa nje wen' ugodl' igolide

Zimkil' iinkomo magwala ndini

Imikhumb' ijolis' eNgilan' isidwa

Isidwa lilifa Labantwana bethu

Nihleli na bethuna?

Ndithi mna

Zimkil' iinkomo magwala ndini!

This was the Johannesburg my father knew. The Johannesburg I would come to know. He survived it.

| Lx | sit |
|---|---|

It is the cough that eventually gets to him. Courtesy of Lexington cigarettes. An incessant and boisterous cough that reverberates through the rafters of our tin shack house. Today it has grown worse. Tears stream down his cheeks every time he coughs, and then he spits into his handkerchief. Blood. In the evening I something deep inside me stirs. I crawl into his bed and curl myself next to him. His body is like coal fire. Hot. My mother comes, pulls the bedding and tells me to go to my bed. I grunt in protest. And when she starts shouting I put up a fight. And win. In the morning he is dead. I lose.

In Bosrand. Nine, four months shy of ten. And wondering what it all means. Nozimanga my mother, is in the kitchen baking fat cakes when Moruti Phumudi, the priest, wearing a black faded suit and carrying a bible in his hand knocks at the door. Shortly after a hymn soars to the wooden beams supporting the corrugated iron roofing. We gather in the living room. He is reading from the bible: 'And God shall wipe away all our tears, and there shall be no more sorrow, no more…I sit and listen but I can't hear anything further.

I see him, my father. He is dressed up in his smart suit, standing tall in his brown suede shoes and is shouting at the top of his voice volume please! Volume Please! I hear jazz, African jazz, Marabi jazz. The noise drowns the still and gentle voice of Moruti Phumudi. Soft candle light dances on animated black faces with bloodshot eyes. I see my mother in a smoke filled room where Moruti Phumudi now stands. I see her and she is pulling a dagga pellet from her stockings, a waiting hand releases a stash of notes in exchange for the dagga. In the din of the shebeen noise she is not afraid. In this room full of men and women drunk and beat up, and cussing and…dying. The candle is holding onto a dying flame. A woman in the corner is moaning softly while a man murmurs something to her ear. They are the only ones left. The noise has subsided. My father is sprawled on the sofa, a cigarette stump between his drooping fingers. This is another time. A time whose witnesses have all

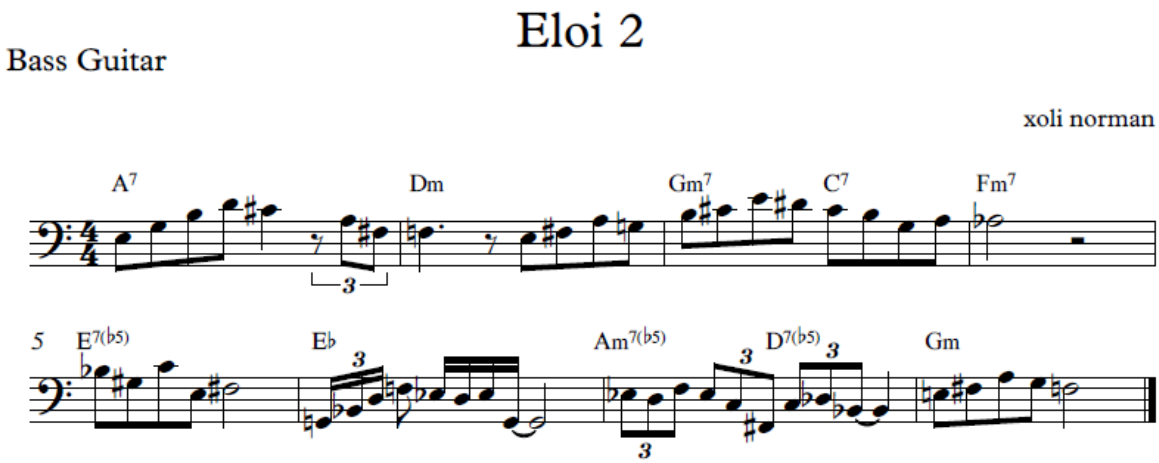
been silenced.

Outside the drunk men break into a song, it is a miners' song:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ke le tshipa | I'm a migrant |
| Ke le tshipa | I'm a migrant |
| He ke le tshipa la ntaba | I'm a migrant of the hills |
| | |
| Ke le kopo kopo kea koposela | I'm an empty box beat about |
| Ke mabele ke qhalane | I'm scattered corn on the threshing foor |
| Ke le tshipa la ntaba | I'm a migrant of the hills |

The taut and scared black faces of the miners filling our house on weekends, men frozen in withdrawals and begging for a spliff, will remain a distant memory. .

**Bass: Eloi**




black souls

far from their homes

lost in the burgeoning mining metropolis

black hands

crawling in and out of the gaping wounds

of the earth hunting for gold in the dark

I often imagine their untold stories

How they might have felt when…

When the ominous feeling overtook them

When the rumble came

from the tempestuous belly of the earth

Whose seismic waves crashed

to protect precious gold rivulets

trapped in rock

Killing some

mutilating the residue

| Lx | **sit** |
|---|---|

So when I was born, the house was a far cry from the din of the *shebeen*. It all changed when *Moruti* Phumudi came paddling his bicycle, preaching Christ, salvation, and the Sabbath. The only stories I hear from my mother are Bible stories. Christ is walking the narrow streets of Galilee healing the sick and feeding the multitudes. But some hate him, his brothers, the Pharisees. Sometimes he disappears into thin air when they try to catch him. But one day, he gets a kiss, from his friend, Judas. A kiss of death. Ha! King of the Jews, they call out his crime in court. It lands him a death sentence.

'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!' He cries from desperation. Every Sabbath I hear him still, crying bitterly while they pin him down. To a tree. It bleeds, the tree. He bleeds. 'Crucify him…Crucify Him!' He hears the angry mob shouting. 'Crucify him…Crucify Him!' He mumbles a few words, asking for water, before He dies.

It is sad, when I hear it. My mother's voice changes, grows softer, kinder, and her eyes get misty like the evening smoke from our chimney. I don't understand it but it does something to me, to my heart. I can see Christ looking at me. And I want to wipe the tears from his eyes, or give Him a drink of water. But…I live here, in Bosrand, we are a bunch of blacks trapped in tiny matchbox houses. This gospel sounds sweet too, when my mother tells it like she has just been to Calvary and has seen Christ the King hanging on the cross dying. In Palestine. Dying for us. In Bosrand.

## 4

| Lx | stand |
|---|---|

Steve Biko also died for us you know. He died in Pretoria, the citadel of the Boers. In the hands of a white supremacist apartheid regime. His only sin was that he was black. Taught us to shout out loud –

Black Power!

Black Power!

Black Power!

Nineteen Seventy Six. Biko's death birthed something in us. It confirmed a suspicion we always held. That we mattered. That our lives counted for something. Biko's memory grew dear and very large in our minds. We keep him safe in our hearts.

**Voice & Bass: Senzeni na?**

They built churches

In Gugulethu

Mamelodi

Mafikeng

Kuruman

Rustenburg

Kimberly

They told us it was for Christ

The Christ who died poor

They took our diamond and gold fields

Christ ate fish and chips

Lx

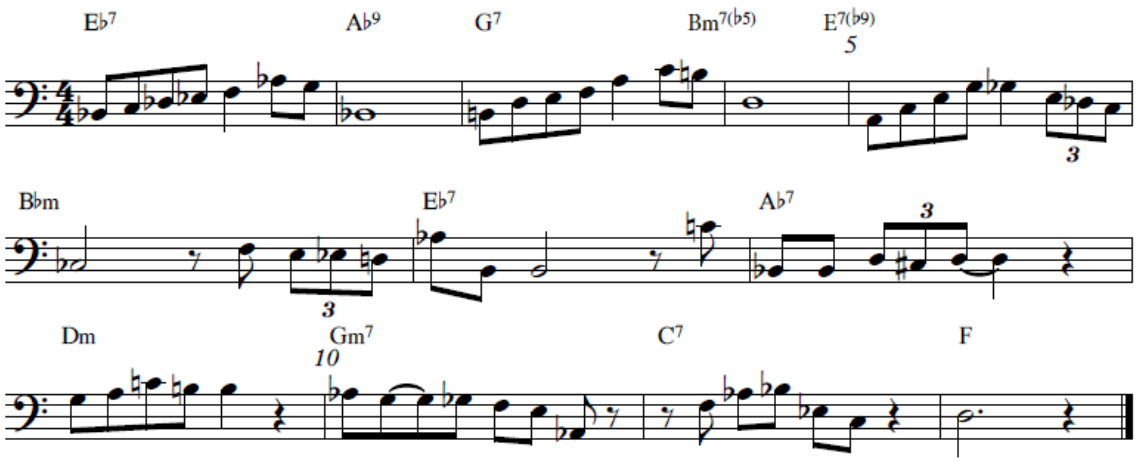
And when the bells toll on Sunday morning, black men shake themselves from the Saturday night *babalaz*, step into Florsheim shoes and stagger to church, their women in laced maxi dresses in tow. They tiptoe into the sermon. Christ is hanging on the wall. Another Christ is an embroidery on the red velvet cloth covering the pulpit.

**Mercy**

# Mercy

Bass Guitar

xoli norman




## 5

Stand

But I'm ahead of myself here.

Lx

I want to talk about Patrick

Yes Patrick

*iGumsha*

The jazz pianist

The itinerant diamond smuggler

My father

How he got far flung from the dazzling lights of the famed city.

Johannesburg

Jo'burg

Jozy

Mjipa

Gauteng *maboneng*

Where the big times move

To the sound of the big bands

Where fate kisses

Daring men and leads them

To hordes of hypnotic girls

Sprawling the dance halls

**Mercy stops**

Under Jo'burg's never setting sun, all these forces mixed and swirled like restless tributaries in search of an ocean. How my father left the big times and ended up in the backwaters of Bosrand, a far cry from the hip times, I shall never know. Except that perhaps he had fallen from grace. The first time I heard the pastor reading the book of Isaiah I couldn't help but think of my father's life:

**Bass Harmonics**

12 "How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the earth,
you who have weakened the nations!

13 "But you said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
and I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the recesses of the north.

14 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.'

15 "Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,
to the recesses of the pit.

16 "Those who see you will gaze at you,
they will ponder over you, *saying,*
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
who shook kingdoms…

**Bass stops**

My father fell. He tore the nocturnal tent draped over Bosrand.

A self-made prince of darkness

Sporting big city haute couture

Brown suede shoes

Sharp zoot suits

Silk ties

And fedora style hats

In a joint

Run by a feisty shebeen queen

Who dabbled in dagga rackets

Nozimanga Angelina

My mother

Who dare contest my legitimacy?

My claim to ghetto royalty?

I'm the real McCoy

Cut from the clipped wings of a beau

Folded in the ample heart of a shebeen queen

**Historical point of view (HPOV).** Bob narrates to the guitar accompaniment: **Illusions**

So the prince dies and many unprincely matters about him surface. One of his many ID documents identifies him as Coloured. That is Mixed-race in official South African speak. 1950, BAM! The Immorality Amendment Act. People of different racial orientations cannot reside together. To enforce this statute, tests are conducted for all those who have Coloured aspirations. Aspirations to pass the classification from Black African to Coloured. The pencil test tops the list. They run a pencil through your hair and if it gets stuck, tough luck, kinky hair, kaffir blood, strong Black African ancestry.

Coloureds, the South African Mixed Race, size each other up according to hair texture. Little Coloured girls suffer the ordeal of hot irons or heated stones on their developing scalps, administered to straighten the hair, a futile attempt at erasure of Black heritage. For the hair, oblivious to political urgencies, grows faster, thicker, woollier than, and as black as hell.

**Music stops**

Hair texture thus becomes a sign of ancestral pedigree and the head, a site for desperate performances of incontestable racial superiority. Patrick has curly hair, the passport to a better life. There are material benefits attached to looking like whites. Why Patrick chooses a hard life when he has the ticket to board the gravy train is baffling. In a South African identity landscape preoccupied with bodily textures, Patrick denies his Coloured identity.

**End of the (HPOV)**

Stand

For my father, I suppose, the black African world represented something bolder, and more real, like a fist held up against the smoking guns. Such a world represented a haven, a place of refuge for the rebel in him. He had not always been a revolutionary.

In his prime he was a school headmaster. While at it, he had attempted a law degree. It was then that he came face to face with what it meant to be a Coloured man in 1940s South Africa. I imagine his shock, following the disappointment of seeing his dreams dashed to the ground by what he thought were his white uncles. I imagine how he must have looked at himself in a new light. How this Coloured thing, this self that he had carried all along started to grow putrid right in front of him. And I imagine how he must have hated himself for looking like the white man.

And something in him snaps.

Lx

Without the chord that had held him close to the tribe, there is no telling how far out he will spiral. When he cut ties with the Coloured world, it is only to himself he comes crushing down. In the black African world, it is on my mother's lap he falls. In a world that is crumbling down, she is the only pair of steady hands. In the new ghetto he mingles and cuts out a brand new identity.

Sit

Soon his world is happening. Friends gather around him like moths to a flame. There is Kid Legs, the soft-spoken, somewhat shy, and youngest cat among them. He has done his fair share of prison time for diamond smuggling. Bra Mbani, the car dealer can hook up a fleet just like that he is so smooth. And then there's Kedibone, the only rose among thorns, a street-smart and tough deal-maker. I think I'll marry her when I'm grown up. That tells you just how pretty she is. Others come and go. Like in all gangs, friendships are fickle and betrayals constant. At times I come home to the lingering smell of daddy's cigarettes. The only memory I hold while he faces the grey walls of *Bougroep* prison. Doing time.

Other times I come home from school and find a fleet of cars lined up along the pavement, jazz spilling out from a wide open door, and my mother cutting across from the kitchen where she is cooking up a storm. Animated talk, the guffaws, the jazz, and the aroma of spices all lend festivity to dull Gobeni Streets. And then upon seeing me my father beams, pulls me to the centre of the room and,

Fellas! Fellas! he screams, his Lexington-scented hand clasping mine.

'You watch this kid

He's gonna turn out into something.

He's gonna be someone'.

He says this to a choreography of nods and grunts of approval. The gang loves me. I guess…because of my father's charisma, his wit...they hold him in high esteem. But my most favourite moment is when they take turns to lift me up in the air. The ghetto corrugated iron rooftops jump up and down, joining in my joy. I land…giddy, dizzy and delighted. They pour coins in the open palms of my little hands. Silver coins too many to count. They are beautiful. These black men in their fancy suits and dazzling cars. The light in my father's eyes tells me he is at his happiest.

| Lx | Stand |
|---|---|

Such moments were few. Rare. But they lasted an eternity in my mind. The proud image of my father is stuck with me still. Not once did I ever see him wake up at the crack of dawn to catch the first bus headed for the factories lining the industrial sites. For Patrick, freedom was not an option. It was never an ideal. It was as palpable as the fancy cups he drank his morning tea from. It was in the very atmosphere of our home. He embellished his black ghetto identity with the meticulous skill of a cat.

## 6

| Lx | Sit |
|---|---|

But all that is over on this crispy July morning.

| **Bass sound effects of the wind** |
|---|

I listen to the howling wind

Watch it riding high

My father lying low

Folded like a garment

Daddy is gone

And so is the boisterous laughter

The music

The jazz

Volume Please!
Volume Please!

And there I am
All alone
Without his tall legs to anchor me
Without the coarse sound of his voice
From years of smoking Lexington
But the jazz

Volume Please!
Volume Please!

The wind keeps talking
Shakes the trees
Threatens to strangle the sun
I wonder where it will toss me
I wonder if it bears my father
On its proud back
Wonder how he can lie still
In the midst of a windstorm
I wonder
About many things
Like jazz

Volume Please!

I hope Patrick, my father, is free at last
Free from the madness
Of false identities
And prison terms
For diamonds he liberated

From his own backyard

Where's the music?

Where's the jazz?

Volume Please!

**Bass stops**

Stand

Since my father could not answer to these questions. The questions of who I was. Who I was to become. I looked to the streets for answers. The mean streets and battleground where I fought in black rage. Whiteness was all the more desirable because it was forbidden, guarded with cannons an justified in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

## 7

Gobeni Street yawns to swallow the procession that conveys my father to his final resting place, it is a familiar defeating ground. I was born here, fallen many a time, laughed and cried here. Fought fierce fights and lost often. 'This Gobeni Street, this familiar battleground, wins again?'

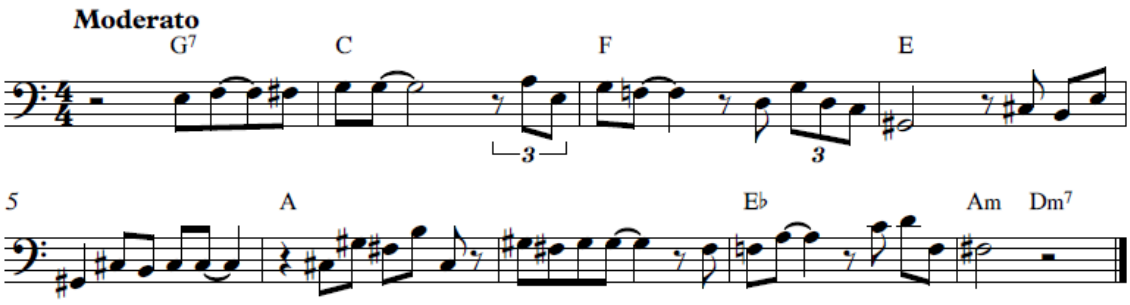
As we approached the *Mmupele* grave yard, Alabama, the Coloured neighbourhood, emerged like an adorned bride at the top of a hill. It was as though geography, life, and death colluded to cement the Black and Coloured divide.

**Bass: The Cross + Morning Prayer**

# The Cross

Bass Guitar

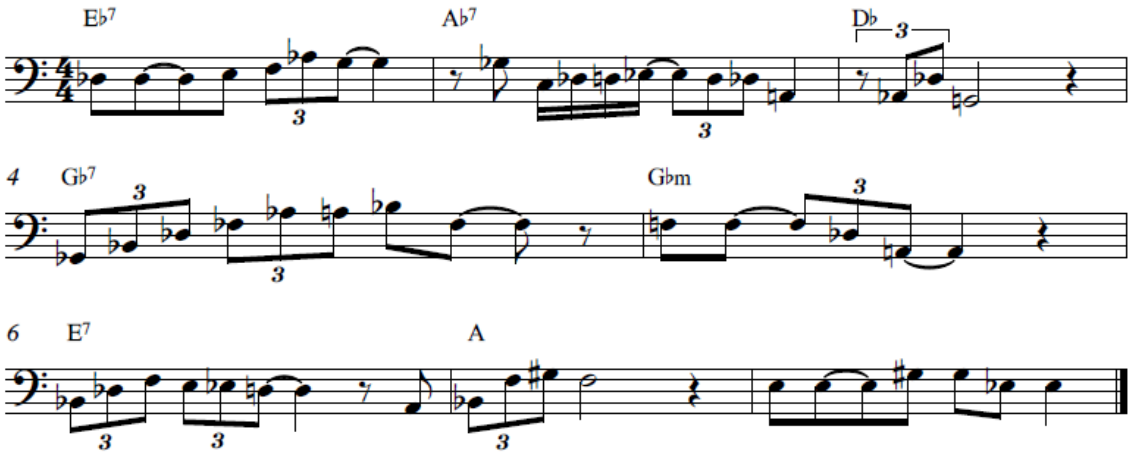
xoli norman




# Morning Prayer 2

Bass Guitar

xoli norman




| Lx | Sit |
|---|---|

I stand and watch, my eyes straining towards Alabama, the desired un-promised land, a thousand thoughts beating in my chest. Wishing I could know how it would really feel to play in her streets. Alabama. Perhaps while playing I might fall and cut my shin, or give out a Coloured cry, to which my mother responds by taking me in her amber hands, speak to me in a fancy tone until I stop crying. These thoughts…like forever... A forever in Alabama that lasted only a few wild wishes of a nine year old… Confused and mixed…ja ne.

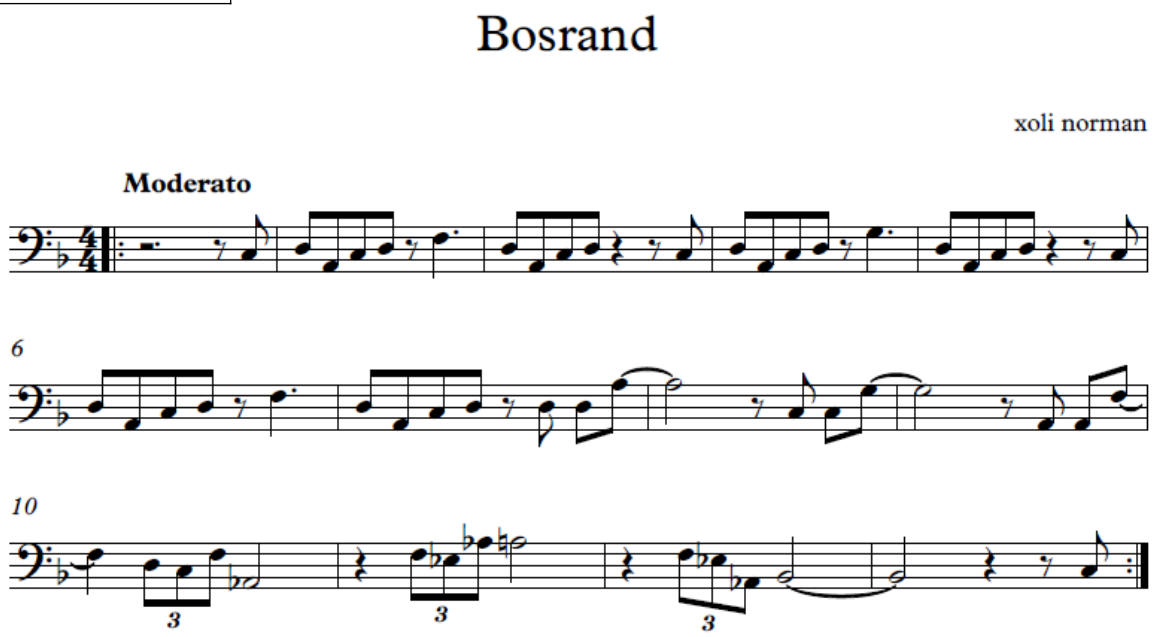
Time now for a farewell…

By the graveside the coffin is lowered down. It descends until it kisses the red earth with a thud. The kiss of death. From now on, only time will watch him. Patrick, my father. Watch him turn to dust. Become nothing. I bid farewell to the many conversations we will never have… the teas we will never sip; and the fights we might have encountered against each other, in the alarming fashion of fathers and sons.

| Lx | Stand |
|---|---|

That year was long. It felt like a decade. I often stumbled into his absence in the living room. Saw him dancing in my mother's mournful eyes. That light that shone in her eyes when she told me of Calvary, was gone. She suffered. I suffered. And we seldom spoke about him, about what we both felt. I suffocated. Beneath the many things my father never told me. Things I would learn, too late, only to discover, it was too early. In Bosrand, these things happen. Boys playing men, and girls lactating over babies that won't stop crying. .

**Bass: Bosrand**




**Bosrand**

...a ghetto perched askance on the

outskirts of Alabama a

nasty asylum eternally floating on a

foul stench a

tributary forged from

rivers of piss a, geography festering on

mutilations of a-

-partheid now turned black on black a-

-trocities where children play *kgati* and

*skotch* among a

people tossed about in a

storm this *kasi* baf'ethu now emerges through my
poetic lens to peep through the
veil of time in echoes of a
thousand distant heartbeats like
memories of my father walking the
dusty Bosrand streets in

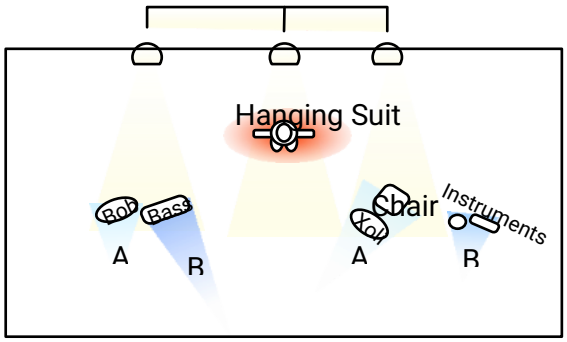
brown suede shoes that left in-
delible marks where he
tripped and fell in love with my
mother she a sun-kissed belle he a-
-shamed of his light skin where
black and white paint drip, drip, dripped from co-
-lonial paintbrushes dipped in
Bloody apartheid buckets and
dyed him in these high yellow hues that
left him dying a-dangling from a
sombre ray of blue I
saw him die in Bosrand still
strapped in his
Brown Suede Shoes

*As lights fade out the duet plays Eloi.*

End

Volume Please! Lighting. NOTE: The below are not lighting states but will be combined in different ways.

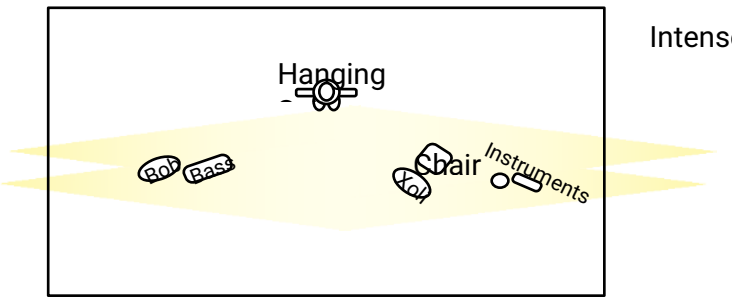
Silhouette/head lights



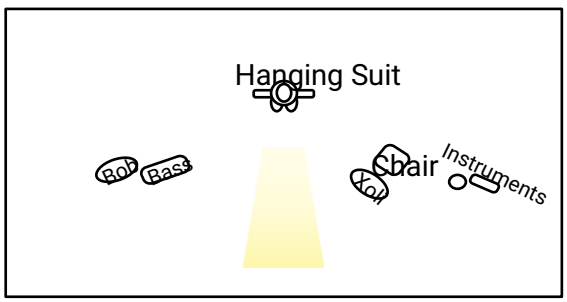

A: Fairly tight, high angled spots for the performers - Steel

B: Spots for the instruments-

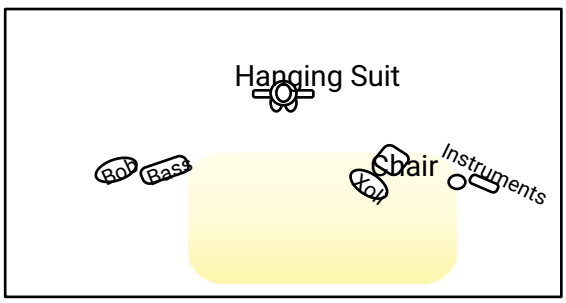
C: Down light for the hanging suit- Yellow/Orange




Intense dance-type light-warm




Grave special




'General 'working area

# Practice 3

## Performing *Volume Please!* at The Furnace

On May 23rd, 2018, I performed *Volume Please!* at The Furnace, a residential plot that with a restaurant specialising in Coloured cuisine, also doubling as performance venue, and a therapy/grooming suit, located on the outskirts of Melville, West of Johannesburg. Melville is a relief from Johannesburg's prudish society. Indiscriminate crowds mill about alternative couture retail outlets, and patronise experimental restaurants and jazz clubs; thus, generating a unique aesthetic charm which bestows a distinct bohemian feel to Melville's predominantly white populace. A few streets west, you're in Westdene, the cusp between Westbury and Triomf – apartheid's eponymous monument of triumph.

For the black Africans however, Triomf symbolises a mausoleum in whose concrete belly lies buried the history of Sophiatown. Perceived a dark spot on Johannesburg's lily-white suburbia, the apartheid architects instituted forced removals, which facilitated the obliteration of black African presence from Sophiatown, and entrenched a systematic racial order in the public space. Footfalls of soldiers' boots, their irate curses in Afrikaans Dutch, the wailing of women and children forced out of their homes spilled onto nearby Westdene. It was through Westdene the truckloads of human cargo rumbled, a dramatic seal to apartheid's irrevocable decision. Westdene, as witness to the cataclysmic historical event, represents the last frontier of black people's dreadful displacement. For this reason, Westdene symbolises a geographical lesion, a tributary streaming apartheid's puss, which festers unabated in black folks' collective memory. Following the release of Nelson Mandela in 1994, and the associated land reforms, Sophiatown has been

expunged of its apartheid past. Still, apartheid's forced removals remain a tender throb, beyond the reach of time's soothing hands.

As I prepared for the performance at The Furnace, bordering Melville and Sophiatown, nostalgia over Bosrand evanesced into legendary memoires of Sophiatown, harvested from a broken chain of narratives, pieced together from *Drum* Magazine's photographic essays. Sounds of cars pulling up at the lot wafted through, breaking a reverie that masked my performance anxiety. In a moment, I would step out, empty myself to a mixed crowd, peppered by Kgafela Oa Magogodi's writing class, a performance cohort of the Wits University School of Arts. It came and went all too fast. The performance that is.

The silence that followed the applause was deafening. I introduced myself, shared my research trajectory, and opened the floor for questions and/or commentary.

'Why identity?'

I joined the audience and followed the voice to the left corner of the room. Her poise on the chair's edge, captured the intent in her voice.

'…I mean why talk about it as though it matters... like it's a big deal?' A chuckle rippled through the silence. And as I began to respond…

'Isn't it that we are who we are' she ploughed through

'…what else is there besides who we are…what we know…this, all this…South Africa?'

All eyes were set on me. These were existential questions. I could never have, in a zillion year, imagined the scenario panning out. I was thrown, to say the least.

'I will respond with yet another question,' I heard myself string out the words.

'You say we are who we are, but who are we?'

She just glared back at me. I got it. She was resolute. Hers was a statement.

The next hour plunged us into a group self-reflection, about South Africa, the precarious state of female subjects, reflected as it was through gender-based violence. Blatant familial fragmentation in Coloured communities, punctuated as it was, by gang wars, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancy. Overwhelming disappointment in the new democracy, accompanied by mass protests against poor service delivery. Topping these concerns was the worrisome threat of the black male child to democracy. 'Fathers are absent in the lives of their sons, period', retorted a woman's voice above the din. Her remark struck a personal chord in me. If truth be told, *Volume Please!* was also an attempt at expressing the fury that had raged throughout my life. It occupied all the yawning spaces inside me, in the wake of papa's absence. I dared myself and shared the following private reflection.

Since my father was the silence in the fury of the question of who I am, I looked to the streets for answers. And the black men I encountered, were long lost to the white man's unuttered promise – if they behaved, they also, like the Coloured, could be part of the race, live in proximity to the city, in better houses, and get second preference on the job market. After the whites. But that promise was too big, impossible, and forbidden. And yet so simple it was achievable. Others had crossed over. Provided they passed the pencil test. They run a pencil through your hair, if it gets stuck, tough luck, you're African, if it sails through, you're Coloured. And the passage, like the cold Atlantic middle passage, was guarded with guns. Where was I to go? I was only nine years old when he died. My father. Patrick.

It would be years before I stumbled upon James Baldwin. The maverick. And embodiment of black thought in the American diaspora. In the steel of his mind, the

question of black identities in white America, turned into a furnace of ideas. And how could I escape those embers, bespoke to the dark caverns of my confusion? Bewildered, I beheld my fledgling tongue, flexing in the hall of his forbidden truths. And then I too, spoke. In tongues. Echoed the incantations of the alchemist. In the bliss, and agony, and blinding light that ensued, I saw him. My father. And I saw myself. The infamy of blackness that joined us flipped to its underbelly, revealing damning contradiction. I, the black African, was also Coloured. Like Patrick.

# Reflections on the performance

The blinding clarity that followed the performance, also plunged me into its darkest shadow, cast by the thoughts expressed that evening. In those concerns, my country emerged, limping, inebriated by hope's bitter fruit. Indifference. It would take an eternity of generations before it could stand on its own two feet again. Unaided. Meanwhile, the escalating debt to the World Bank and the IMF, and the billions of Rands squandered by successive post-apartheid governments, held it by the hand, steering it to economic slavery, the price of political freedom. The troubling remarks at The Furnace could be summed up into this: the state officials' corruption, lack of credible leadership, unprecedented levels of unemployment, alongside the scourge of gender-based violence, and the plummeting value of the Rand, give concrete form to the suspicion that ours is pseudo-freedom. We all still had to reach the rainbow's end, if someone could show us its starting point. If apartheid had sowed the wind, Mandela's children floundered in the whirlwind. Cresting that storm, I was tossed about between the national statistics and the public contradictions of my identity.

I, black African and Coloured. I, the rainbow nation incarnate, carried the

irreconcilable paradoxes as embodiment of private contradiction. I would need to improvise, to jazz my way through. *Volume Please!* became that maiden voyage in extempore. I knew a big part of me, the question of who I was, also lay hidden in the most unlikely of places. So, I plunged into the grand maze of statistical data, the grammar of official narratives, and the bits of what my father had left behind; and the pieces that remained after his sojourn into the apartheid abyss. This assortment, messy, jagged, and crude, was the only skeleton I held onto. And *Volume Please!* would prop it up, muscle it up, and walk it down memory lane. This was my story, his-(s)tory, improvised into one. I was rejecting the handed down version of my life story, with all its seamless, and linear appeal. Resorting instead, to the piecing together of my fractured identity via improvisation. Theorised as a jazz concept, and rehabilitation of the African pentatonic scale, improvisation as a modern black performance idea, is linked to the conception of the African American blues tradition. Ralph Ellison remarks thus on the internal sonic instabilities that motivate the improvisational impulse in jazz:

> There is a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation represents (like the successive canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity as he finds it. (Cited in Gates, 1988: 1)

I extrapolate the idea of jazz improvisation into identity performance, to suggest that fractured identity materials cohere, at the level of improvisation, at the level of finding and losing. Thus, fractured identities are seldom a private enterprise. In their marginal socio-cultural positioning, they also hinge onto the centre of identity economies. Reconstruction of fractured identities therefore, relies on the

appropriation of the ideal, the incorporation of fixed identity phenomena, while it simultaneously entails their critical revision. In the effort to render one's life's meaning, one is morally bound to observe the borders that delineate others as such, and to find oneself in the 'other'.

In other words, progressive identity appraisal necessitates, active acknowledgement of the differential varieties of identity, even if those classes are (or seem) antagonistic to one's circumstance. Herein lies the radical aspect of improvisation. It leaves no excess in its execution. It wields both friend and fiend in its embrace. Consequently, the quest to reconstruct my fractured identity, renders crucial the understanding of the systematic construction of Coloured identities, in which I am implicit.

Colouredness, conceptually and materially, owes its advent to the colonial encounter on the African continent and the diaspora. Furthermore, as a race idea, it has spawned both racist and racialised positions, from the key players in the colonial encounter – the black African and the Colonist. In the convergence, and inevitable antagonism of these differentiated positionalities, contains the historical graph that charts the genesis, and trajectory of contemporary cultural, economic, and political attitudes meted towards Coloureds.

While black African attitudes towards the Coloured have, for the most part, manifested as observable cultural phenomena, the colonist has, on the other hand, generated literature, which is endemic to the colonising expedition. Colonial race theory therefore, becomes central to our understanding of the colonising thought, especially the attitudes it propagated from its position of political and economic power. Black African cultural productions emanating from Johannesburg, have the exclusion of Coloureds in common.

As epicentre of economic, political, and cultural development, Johannesburg signals the vanguard. Consequently, the trends it generates are far reaching. For example, *King Kong* (1959), the first internationally acclaimed musical, bequeathed to key Johannesburg musicals of critical acclaim, the exclusion of Coloureds. *Sponono* (1961), *Manana, the Jazz Prophet* (1963), *Isikalo* (1966), *How Long* (1973), *Sophiatown* (1986) and *Sarafina* (1987), converge at the chiasm of Coloured exclusion. In general, forms of cultural representation are perceived to give expression to the beingness of people groups that constitute a nation. In this sense, representational efforts entrench people's geographical, national, as well as racial and identities. Exclusion from such efforts is tantamount to identity erasure.

Subliminally reflected in the cultural exclusion of Coloured identity, are the nation's identity economies. These economies express the racial spectrum in the collective imaginary. Albeit obliquely, they also articulate the manner in which ideas about race implicate in popular forms of cultural expression. Purview of South Africa's colonial race theory demonstrates, on one level, the roots of racial, as well as racist meanings attached to Colouredness. It also illustrates, on another, the links between contemporary forms of race consciousness, and the political unconscious, of which the stock of tropes, myths, and taboos contain.

> From our vantage point, the peculiar 'problem' of the half-caste consisted ultimately in the way his or her very existence undermined the neat binary classification in which the power relations of colonial society were grounded. Between the signs of black and white in the signifying system of political discourse, a third 'unnatural' sign insinuates itself, a sign created by the blending of elements upon whose very discreteness the signifying capacity of the system depends (Cornwell: 24).

Consequently, the discontent in the contemporary Coloured race outcry - 'In the past we were not white enough, and today, we are not black enough' – can be heard the clamour of liminal identities. As indices of the fringe, the poor, and ungovernable,

Coloured communities frame the frontiers of race consciousness in South Africa. 'Not black enuff…not white enuff' articulates the devaluation of the Coloured currency in the polarised identity economic schema. If in the contemporary South African identity politics, the Coloured race is distinguished by a lack of melanin, it was ironically the Coloured's surplus melanin that posed a threat to the colonial literary thought.

'In this intercourse between black and white, it is not the "superior" race which raises the inferior; it is the white which sinks to the coloured level of thought and morality. There is a powerful but baneful force in the black nature which debases and deteriorates the white which comes under its influence'. (Ibid, p27)
Cornwell also remarks on how Schreiner '…gives serious consideration to a genetic theory of regression first applied to anthropology by Gobineau, whereby the "crossing of different varieties which each breed perfectly true [. . .] produce[s] [. . .] unstable creatures with a tending to revert to the primitive original type of the race" (Ibid: 23) .

As Cornwell aptly observes, Schreiner's exposition of race is achieved, among other schema, through the literary performance of a biological turn. The oblique analysis of race, which proposes genetic sites as sole determinants of racial legitimacy, potentially collapses identity complexity into a biological imperative. Thus, not only is the genetic import essentialised, but Coloured racial ambiguity is postulated as attenuation of the genetic code, and adulteration of racial purity. Absurd as it is, Schreiner's idea cannot be dismissed as such, as it articulates the ideological basis of the derogatory names assigned the Coloured: Amper Kaffir (Almost Kaffir), iQheya (Xhosa ethnic slur for Coloured), and Boesman (Bushman – linking the Coloured to the Khoi-San, but with accent on physiological affinity). With

foci on the corporeal, these appellations serve as physiological catalogues, aimed at fixing Colouredness to linear, and tactile meanings.

In relation to meanings of Colouredness, juxtaposition of the colonial race discourse, cultural exclusion, and the impositions of exclusively physiological identity labels, demonstrates the complex and rootedness of racist attitudes. In their performance of a historical narrative sorority, cultural representation and political thought collude in the public production, distribution, and management of hegemon-bound race consciousness. Upon closer reading, such stratagem is not arbitrary as it upholds the political/cultural edifice aimed at policing human geographies. For ideological consent to Mixed-race legitimacy, would lead to the acceptance of the provocative idea, of the malleability of the genetic site to improvisation. Such acceptance would not only rupture overreliance on historicised narratives, as sole arbiters of race discourse and identity performance; but the idea of improvised racial identities would act as indictment on the limited scope, and vocabulary of identity economies.

Autobiographical performance therefore, intervenes as embodied critique of the cultural/political alliance in the interpretation of our everyday social realities. It explores performance strategies appropriate to the revaluation of individual identities. Especially their easy appropriation into historical narratives aimed at the valorisation of the status quo. To this end, the body is proffered as irrefutable evidence of subjective truth, which it carries in its everyday encounters. Thus, the idea of shared public spaces as key sites in the construction, and performance of individual identities, pivots around an equally compelling idea, of the body as progressive text. In this sense, autobiography draws attention to the body's power as subjective palimpsest in shared public spaces.

Coloured labelling reveals a peculiarly South African political unconscious, and carries far-reaching socio-political implications for Coloured communities. However, it often escapes critical appraisal as such. Masquerading social cohesion, negative labelling stealthily frames everyday cultural encounters, and thus passes for innocuous identity minutiae. However, shared public spaces assume platforms for identity construction, consolidation, and performance. They become the stages on which identity generates content. and models form. Within such a paradigm, the streets serve as a critical infrastructural basis. Especially when one considers their primacy in the politically motivated demarcation of the urban landscape. Official signage conveying commercial, directional, as well as residential information, also distils the dictatorial voice of hegemon into seemingly functional public good. For its subliminal projection and advance of authoritarian iconography, this code relies significantly upon the streets.

The complex infrastructure of our everyday lives finds concrete expression in this seemingly simplistic inoffensive equation. Beneath its façade, the transmutation of intricate ideological worlds into concrete geographies is stage managed. It takes the form of racial identity profiling, the economic classification of communities, which in turn determine the grid for priority sections of society, for the systematic roll out of social services. For this reason, beneath the veneer of everydayness, the streets function as contested ideological sites.

In the extraordinary everydayness of our lives, language mediates the contest as functional text, while simultaneously imposing labels that determine individual life chances in the socio-political spectrum. It was therefore pertinent for me to explore through the autobiographic narrative, spoken language poetry, and the sonic registers of jazz, to critique the overreliance on language, that pervades performance

texts.

The idea of the innocuity of disparaging Coloured labels (cited earlier on in this section), is misleading. Non-official vocabularies often slip into dominant texts, thus assuming a simulacrum of duplicity. As a general structural basis for subcultural texts, street patois distinguishes itself through radical translations of politically motivated texts. Street jargon facilitates the relatively easy delivery of intricate ideas. Chief among its strategies, in the simplification of elaborate phenomena into common tropes, is the use of humour, and the incorporation of popular imagery. Instrumental as countercultural tool, patois distils abstraction into bite-sized portions of vernacular grammar. Decoding ideas and assigning them alternate perspectives, street vernaculars deliberately subvert ideological intent. Stripped off of hegemon's subjective registers, the tyranny of ideology is thrown into sharp relief.

If the philosophical thought is the gravitas in ideology's tyranny, humour displace such intent, and commits to the countercultural rationale, one predicated on the grammar of the socially and politically marginalised. Due to its subversive power, however, subcultural grammar is vulnerable to misappropriation. It is therefore potentially implicit in the articulation of the ideals of dominant ideologies. Disparaging Coloured nomenclature that persists in post-apartheid South 'Africa evinces the case. The mirroring of dominant imaginary by the symbolism in subcultural language, may not, however, adequately answer the question of Coloured marginality in South Africa's socio-political spectrum. To this puzzle, the other piece may well lie in the phenomenon of colonial-encounter-residua.

Post-apartheid attitudes aggregate, in the collective black African political sentiment to rid the 'new' South Africa of old colonial iconography. Among others,

the rebranding of public spaces after political struggle stalwarts, articulate the ideal to purge the land of apartheid memorabilia. Inauguration of the idea of a 'new' South Africa in concrete terms – perceived also as a calculated performance act by the state, to appease the black African voting constituency - entailed a systematic erasure of the traces of the colonial encounter. Such reckoning coincided with the generally accepted notion of the favourable position the Coloured is thought to have enjoyed under apartheid. Albeit obliquely, the marginal positioning of Coloured communities in the four successive democratic dispensations, led respectively by Mandela, Mbeki, Zuma, and currently Ramaphosa, articulates the political bias against Coloureds.

More than a corollary of political censure, the pattern may be revealing the fragile position of the Coloured in the collective black African unconscious. Heretofore covered beneath a uniform veneer of apartheid victimhood, exercise of political power reveals the myth of ethnic heterogeneity. Considering how the Tamil in Sri Lanka, favourites of British Imperialism, harvested socio-political relegation in a Buddhist Sinhalese-dominated government, perhaps the intercontinental pattern - complicated as it is by religious undertones, as well as the Dutch and British imperial imperatives - explains the deep-seated divisions among the colonised groups. The parallel however, draws attention to the fragile political bargaining power wielded by groups perceived to embody imperial residua.

Spawned by the performance at The Furnace, these ideas surfaced intermittently on my mind, a jumbled-up pile, each contesting for urgent attention. Most vociferous among these was the question: 'Why identity?' In a series of post-performance reflections, it dawned on me, perhaps with unprecedented clarity, how *Volume Please!*, immersed in the bigger questions of Colouredness, also carries the

ethical burden of Coloured embodiment in performance. In the sanctuary of solitude that reflection afforded me, I charted the trajectory of how the play, as a form of autobiographical practice, simultaneously located me within, and projected me beyond the everydayness imposed on my life by the historicised narrative accounts of Colouredness. At best, these accounts, shut me out of my claim to Colouredness. Employing the potentially distancing yet intimate autobiographic lens, *Volume Please!* facilitates the transmutation of complex Coloured identity notions into a shared personal experience. Through this vehicle, I shared my subjective narrative which, arbitrarily, colludes with, and seeks to dispense with the stock of myths and stereotypes associated with Colouredness. I realised also, both cognitively and through embodied knowing, how even my imagined subjectivity was, unwittingly, implicated in myriad complex connections. Language, politics, and national memory. Conceived precisely to involve individuals in the articulations of power, these instruments delineate critical foci for the autobiographic practise.

For this reason, the quest for freedom in autobiographic terms, translates to the pursuit for representational strategies beyond historicity's limiting frameworks. This quest is, a private matter first, before its claims to the collective agenda. In the privacy of my search I have had to summon enough courage, to kill the kind literary gods who had helped me traverse the menacing journey of my search for identity. An essentially racial conundrum, I would find out in time. I realise now that I also deeply mourn the death of Baldwin's race discourse, with the inevitable grasp that preoccupation with race, has the power to conceal the bigger question of the politics of being human.

I embraced race consciousness precisely because of its innately seductive character. Especially the manner in which it articulated my victim position, in the

scheme of imperial historical narratives. I dared not refute the facts then, nor am I in a position to do so now. Equally, I wonder if besieged races do not collude in the siege, by answering to linear questions that pervade the race discourse. As aptly observed by Sara Ahmed, 'When you have to fight to be taken seriously, when you have to fight to be a legitimate person, it can make you identify with the norms that are excluding you' (2014: 19). Reduction of the self, in order to fit into the colonial narrative discourse, entails profound attrition. It comes with the protracted effort, to articulate the self in foreign terms. If imperialism qualifies, that is, as invasion. And foreign. Notwithstanding the critique, construction and performance of Volume Please! are incidental to imperial apartheid.

The performance of the play at The Furnace was difficult. The silence that resonated in the single question, the strangeness of the performance, in that an atypical Coloured, predominantly black African, betrayed by the wrong accent, and melanin content, are but few of the pointers to the play's difficult reception. Understandably so. What came strongly to the fore after the performance, or as a result of it, were the strong divisions between the black African, and Coloured communities, as evidenced in the post-show Q&A.

Added to this factor, was that I had no exemplar in the distinct social divisions that typified South Africa's racial spectra. As a result, the audience did not have the means to process my racial, political, and cultural affinity in the world of the play. My peculiar doubleness. It was difficult, because my representational positionality, did not fit the dichotomic model articulated in the black African/Coloured divide. For the black African, my representational obligations lie with the African, while for the Coloured, my corporeal attributes, are suspect for a reliable Coloured representative. These difficult notions, articulated in the single question, echoed in the silences,

express the fraught nature of identity politics and representation. These silences, also expressed a conceptual disconnect between the realities emanating from the fact of the ‘new’ South Africa, and identity. The reality of the democratic dispensation however, was one of direct connections between the potential life chances individuals had at their disposal, and their identities.

Regular protests to date, are indication that for many, the ‘new’ South African democracy fails to leap off the glowing pages, into people’s lives. For the Coloured, however, the experience carries collective undertones. The collective expression ‘In the past we were not white enuff, today we are not black enuff’ expresses, not only racial disenchantment, but also highlights socio-political trajectories that post-apartheid governments share with colonial social frameworks. Unsettling as the idea is, it is not hyperbole. For the ruling black elite, there is not much to calibrate in the orchestration of the wealth of a staggering 56 million populace. Colonial apartheid already laid the foundations.

Broadcast in apartheid’s social engineering, geographical demarcations, and wealth distribution, were designs that ensured the sustenance, and propagation of a separatist, and divisive status quo. Advancing from such a template were (and still are), ghettoes, home to millions of the poorest of black families. Far flung from amenities, immobilised by exorbitant costs of transport to urban centres of development, and looking to the government’s promises of a bail out. These communities are beset with frustration, which often spills out in the form of collective rage. Service delivery protest marches, provide the framework for its expression. Characterised by the torching of libraries, municipality offices, clinics and post offices, these protests portray a gruesome picture of a revolution in rehearsal.

To quell these public demonstrations, almost always without fail, government engages the brute force of the police, the coercive instrument inherited from colonial apartheid. Coloured communities on the other hand, tend to suffer in silence. Their geographical isolation from the rest of black South Africa, frames other forms of isolation. Complex, elusive, and unquantifiable. Within this immaterial spectrum, Coloureds inhabit a different kind of South Africa. One of gang violence, relentless drug abuse, and rampant teenage pregnancy. The latter, also symptomatic of the structural breakdown of the Coloured family, serves to sanction the myths that buttress negative Coloured stereotyping.

Coloured isolation extends beyond its physical address, and thus necessitates critical review of external socio-cultural perceptions deployed upon Coloured identity construction. For example, it is normative practice to associate Coloured language inflections with the apartheid masters. Thus, the reading of Dutch cadence into Coloured vernaculars, becomes instrumental in the translation of cultural attributes into political phenomena. Similarly, Coloured complexion, perceived to radiate the carnal sins of enlightenment, encodes physiology with racializing textual attributes. The prejudice connecting these perceptions, achieve with great artifice, the rerendering of Coloured bodies as palimpsest of foreign cultural and genetic symbolism.

Being Coloured in South Africa therefore, entails bearing the brunt of a genetic code gone awry; it is to wilt in the cold dark shadows cast by perceptions of others, the kind only Coloured bodies know intimately. So much for the rainbow bodies. In a country that planted ‘rainbow-ism’ as premium on its national identity tag, there is very little to harvest for the Coloured, who is the last frontier of racial plurality, and the very embodiment of the rainbow ideal.

The simultaneity of black African and Coloured identities in *Volume Please!* foregrounds my double identity, and employs this concurrency to articulate a third position in the black African/Coloured dichotomy. Conceived as lived experience testimonial, *Volume Please!* draws attention to the complex spectrum of Coloured identities, in relation to the problematic notions of ownership, and claims to its representation. The play sets out to problematise the insistence on the portrayal of black African, and Coloured identities in performance as incontestable dichotomy reflective of empirical social phenomena. Ultimately, *Volume Please!* challenges audience appraisal patterns that standardise the black African/Coloured disconnect. For prevalent appropriations of empirical race relations into representational schema, which often lend credibility to performance, equally reify the status quo.

Restoration of nonprogressive race phenomena in performance, therefore, potentially iterates ascendant race ideology. From a performance politics perspective, revisions of these patterns entail, among others, a divergent kind of referencing, beyond the empirical framework. Such assessments necessitate engagement of the prophetic voice as radical medium in the enunciation of difference. Thus, the prophetic voice as performance strategy, enunciates the imaginary of a different, plural, and progressive social structure. The search in theatre practice, for key performance strategies that best amplify the prophetic voice, coincides with contemporary cultural practices that are historically linked to projects of emancipation, decolonisation, and autonomy. Spoken- word-poetry, jazz, and autobiography, have invariably emerged as key strategies in the framing of the prophetic voice, and which I shall discuss in the next section. Furthermore, the three continue to feature prominently in the radical cultural agitation practices aimed at economic, as well as political freedoms. Their appropriation as structural framework

in *Volume Please!* creates a sonic platform, from which I plead for higher decibel levels of the prophetic voice.

# Analysis: findings, and significance

## Refiguring the black voice in autobiography

In *Volume Please!* spoken-word-poetry figures as one of the performance strategies. Spoken-word-poetry has emerged as a contemporary black pedagogic and performance strategy. It is increasingly figuring in performance discourse as the index to black narratives. Nellie Y. McKay, among others, theorizes it within the frameworks of identity performance.

> …the life story (or portions of it) has been the most effective forum for defining black selfhood in a racially oppressive world (1998: 96).

McKay problematizes the assumptions deployed on the use of the term 'self'. Generally assumed to denote individual identity, the label ruptures when subjected to race theory. McKay prefixes it with 'black' to draw foci to the discontinuities that persist between the stable and mutable meanings inherent in the term, and the ideological and concrete realities it inhabits and forestalls. 'Self' is generally assumed to denote intrinsic human value via its two primary corollaries, the equitable distribution of the assumption among the individual members of a group, and the manifestation of this assumption in the collective organization of polity. However, 'black selfhood' produced in the colonial spectrum is not the same as the one which signals human dignity. The critical assessment through psychoanalysis and psychological theory, of the relationship between colonialism and fractured black identities, led Fanon to surmise:

> 'Because it is a systematic denial of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly 'In reality, who am I?' (1990: 200)

Generalizing from empirical observations of the colonial experience to the detail of

fractured psychological states of its victims, Fanon advanced to theorize the colonial encounter as a critical site for the production and propagation of aberrant black identity phenomena:

> …the defensive attitudes created by this violent bringing together of the colonized man and the colonial system form themselves into a structure which then reveals the colonized personality (1990: 200).

Forms of Black identities that emerge from both Fanon and McKay extend the field of identity inquiry and performance. Fanon problematized manifest black identity behavioural patterns by subjecting them to a revisionist analytical framework. Juxtaposing pre-colonial and colonial psychological states, Fanon submits the difference as the morphing of black psyches; and embodied evidence of contact with the colonizing experience. Fanon's 'colonized personality', references the black psychological life that has acquired aberration. How then might performance employ strategies that redirect audience association of aberration with black corporeality? In other words, which performance models best confront and influence the gaze falling on bodies marked with aberration? These questions are an attempt to reposition the black body in the MetaFrame of the universal gaze that assigns black identities to the base of the global racial scale.

McKay's insistence on the 'life story…as an effective forum' foregrounds autobiographical practice as a radical response to 'a racially oppressive world'. Extending Fanon's rationale, McKay asserts that in a world where the definition of the 'self' is not universal, it becomes imperative to inaugurate the marginal 'self' via delineation. 'Black selfhood' therefore, deliberately assumes literary double marginalization as a radical delineating marker.

*Volume Please!* refigures jazz and spoken-word-poetry as critical contemporary markers of black performance strategies. The play locates itself

within the ongoing critique of the reading of black identities via literary tropes. How these strategies might best serve as models for the critical revision of black representations - while harnessing the intellectual labour on the survey of black identity politics - informs the thematic and methodological concerns in *Volume Please!* The play reimagines autobiographical as an experimental site, where jazz and spoken-word-poetry form the arms of a strategic performance chiasma.

## *Volume Please!* a contemporary South African autobiography

*Volume Please!* locates in the practice-as-research framework, with spoken-word-poetry and jazz inform as its performance style. From this organization, the play models a three-tier conceptual design – autobiography, spoken-word-poetry, and jazz. If we accept the maxim that all works of art are products of their historical moments, then the inevitable corollary holds, that every artistic output is determined by, and linked to, peculiar cultural traditions. Consequently, the position of *Volume Please!* in the South African cultural history cannot be ignored. Nor can the notion be ignored, of representation as a derivative, that is, a thing contrived within a continuum of cultural labours. These conjectures resonate with Hall's assertion that:

> the practice of representation always implicates the positions from which we speak or write – the position of enunciation' (Hall, 1998: 68).

South Africa has colossal implications for the identity of *Volume Please!* The country's geographical and colonial past converged as spillages that marked the play. It became critical, therefore, to position *Volume Please!* in the cultural trajectory that reflected this confluent phenomenon.

# Purview of South African autobiographical practice

A canvass of the South African theatre timeline maps autobiographical practices to the post-apartheid period. Topping the glossary of this phenomenon are the plays *Umm…Somebody Say Something* (2000) by Masike & Michaels, and *No Room for Squares* (2000) by Merckel & Coleman. On the heels of Mandela's release, the plays were an addition to the melange framing the prevailing meta-narrative of political euphoria. In the context of the political unconscious, the plays were thus easily misappropriated into myriad performance strategies that sought to concretize the phenomenon of South Africa's emergent democracy.

Both unpublished, these plays shared the foregrounding of marginal Coloured (Mixed-race) identities and the autobiographical model. Paucity of the plays' critical evaluation is a silent pointer to the regulatory role of discourse. It draws our attention to the tendency, in the methodical labour of assessment, to overlap performance and literary theory borders, such that unpublished, yet significant, creative outputs are subliminally devalorized via critical commentary lacunae. Consequently, the plays' staging of marginal subjects, unwittingly extended to their insignificant 'othering' on the stages of critical theory; if for a moment, we can postulate that discourse is tantamount to performance.

## *Umm…Somebody Say Something*

*Umm…Somebody Say Something* was a Wits University production, workshopped by

an all-female student cast, and directed by Keitumetsi Masike and Yolandi Michaels. Featuring four autobiographical narratives, the play, however, delineated itself through the agency of young voices that agitated for individual freedoms hitherto proscribed under apartheid's collectivizing narrative schema. Linked thematically to the plight of marginal identities, the autobiographies invested the play with subjective dissent, whose register fostered dissonance to the enthused collective political performance.

The play's characters, identically branded Specimen, with numerical suffixes as delineating device, further recreated a common fringe social status in the world of the play. With their distinct character names jettisoned, and thus divested of their social reference, black bodies populated the stage as nouveau entities, beyond the bounds of limiting discourse, and equally relieved of the burden of historical symbolism. A proxy history emerged instead, advancing the unsettling idea of the body as a postmodern site, marked with contradiction, incoherence, and rapture. The distinct mixed-race features of Specimens 1 and 2, provided the play with credible evidence for its argument trajectory. Their corporeality was presented as biology's neutral phenomenon, which generated its social identity and status, in the dominant cultural taxonomies and their generative discourses. Thus, the play highlighted the problematic taxonomic base that informed discourses on body politic. In its seemingly innocuous pursuit of knowledge, bodily discourse suffers, that is, from the unfortunate coincidence of delineating, through marking, and concretizing phenomena within the limits of labelling.

Hybridity, a discursive label aimed at our better understanding of Coloured bodies, is simultaneously the concretization of disapproval. Thus, unwittingly, discursive labours, as portrayed in the play, are seen to be in collusion with the

dominant projects of social stratification. Staged as a biologically staged phenomenon, Colouredness in the play was refigured to highlight hybridity as a problematic notion, if in its purest sense, was to be confined to apprehensions of identity. As a means to overcome the double-enunciation inherent to conceptual frameworks, hybridity and Colouredness were used interchangeably to underscore postmodern identity ambiguities pervasive in contemporary category schemes. These interpretations of Colouredness suggested departures from traditional modes of representation. King Kong (1959), had represented the Coloured subject as absent 'other'. While Gibson Kente's theatre oeuvre – reaching its pinnacle in the classic, How Long (1973) - reflected Soweto's rich street patois as a subcultural tool in the struggle against apartheid, it inadvertently represented the apartheid experience as an exclusively black African collective discontent. Perhaps chiefly due to its connection to the Wits Drama School, and the politically turbulent 80's, Junction Avenue Theatre Company's representation of 50's Sophiatown in the eponymous musical *Sophiatown* (1986), exhibited an unprecedented degree of convergences between cultural outputs and political critique. Reflective of this historical junction, *Sophiatown* was marked by an acute sense of cultural ethics, in the manner it addressed the historical absence of Coloured subjects. Charlie, the only Coloured character, although cast in a marginal role, salvaged the play's authenticity. His marginal status, however, also reflected not only what Coloureds meant to the creators of the play, but also foregrounded Johannesburg's collective unconscious. Thus, the historical trajectory reflected Johannesburg's theatre tradition as a phenomenon defined, either by corporeal interpretations of identity, or its obligation to the representation of identity along racially demarcated geographies. Inscribed within these modes of interpretation were apartheid's problematic tropes, generated

from racialized hierarchies of both concrete and human geographies. Furthermore, this hierarchical structure further engendered a white literary canon that conceived of white racial identity as a purer breed. A centre around which all other identities were constructed, politicized, and against which they were polarized in the literature of the early twentieth century. Commenting on this canon in *White Writing*, J. M. Coetzee had the following to say: 'The racism of this discourse is so crude – "naked" and "shameless," '(Coetzee, 1988: 137).

Whiteness was conceived in colonial literary thought as a homogenous, and coherent entity. It also invested white bodies with anxieties of contamination by specimens of impure breeds. *Umm…Somebody Say Something*'s method of mapping identity phenomena to literary thought was, upon closer reading, no arbitrary gesture. As alternative to limited and limiting imperial literary frameworks, the play rerenders Colouredness through modernity's global literary lenses.

## *Umm…Somebody Say Something*: Performing modernity

The performance of Colouredness alongside conceptual underpinnings of modernity underscores, albeit indirectly, the centrality of the notion of contamination in both. If corporeal Colouredness is threatened by pure and impure conceptual binaries, modernism on the other hand employed high art and mass culture as its disjunctive binary standard.

Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture. Both the strength and weaknesses of modernism as an adversary culture

derive from that fact. (Huyssen, 1986: vii)

Huyssen draws foci to the inherent contradictions that underpin modernity, the structural basis of its discourse on the one hand, and the derivative praxis it generated on the other. Modernism's foundation can be mapped to the pre-industrial dichotomy between good and evil; its trajectory, however, Huyssen suggests, is potentially prefigured in the ubiquitous populist culture it opposed. In the predictable custom of all vanguard crusades, modernism delineated itself as the forerunner, until postmodernism challenged the 'increasingly consuming and engulfing mass cultural traits' that had overtaken its course (ibid).

Althusser's prophesies in *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* bear resonance, and I paraphrase 'we as the human species, have not evolved to an extent that we can initiate independent ideological frameworks. Consequently, even the fiercest revolution, borrows from the very force it opposes' (Althusser: 2006).

It is with postmodernist discursive frameworks that *Umm…Somebody Say Something* forges a sorority. Both celebrated the notion of identity as a complex confluence of paradoxes. In its critique of modernist binaries, the play potentially argued for a different understanding of Colouredness. Breach of traditional representational forms was a challenge to modernist notions at the heart of the racial organization. In performing the body's postmodern states, the play foregrounded the problematic milieu of identity, its construction, and representation.

This embodied critique pointed to the external and passé priorities of modernism: the transformation of human environments into landscapes, mobilization by print media for greater freedom to police transactions of civic, regional, and national governance, and the mass cultural identity which resonated with the icons of modernism – power plants, the reliance of production on industry

and the emphasis on speed. All these imperatives, which legitimated modernism's scope, also rescinded subjective identity phenomena. And around this philosophical rationale pivoted the play's multifarious narrative.

The play's ideological narrative demonstrated, perhaps due to the academic setting, the porous boundaries between the academy and student identity constructions; and between the academy's meaning construction strategies and performances of imagined identities. To the students of political science, the play's socio-political landscape draws attention to the complex relations between critical theory and the reconfigurations of public identities in performance practice. *Umm…Somebody Say Something* reflected these spatial and ideological convergences in its review of the notions of a 'new' South Africa. In the subversion of legacy colonial geographies, the play was performing its key argument: colonial borders were not nomological, but constructed phenomena; if so, staged imaginary worlds, were not copies, but parallel subjective universes.

The body's state of flux (as a constituent of its corporeality) - rendered spillage in the colonial vocabulary - the argument advanced - could only be reinstated and given full expression in the scope of imaginary worlds, whose ideological universe could accommodate subjective complexities. As a result, the critical narrative strategies that figured in *Umm…Somebody Say Something*, inaugurated the play into the category of key contemporary exemplars of South African autobiographical practice. *No Room for Squares* was one other such exemplar.

## *No Room for Squares*

*No Room for Squares* (2000) was conceived by Coco Merckel and Robert Coleman

as a one-hander set to live jazz trio music. Coco, both protagonist and narrator, takes the audience along as he covers the ground his family was forced to travel. From Newclare, the Coloured ghetto, he backtracks to 50's Sophiatown, where it all started. A peri-urban settlement and home to Coloureds, Blacks, and Asians, Sophiatown was decreed a black spot, on white linen by the veto of the racial segregation policy of 1950 (South African Institute for Race Relations, 1950: 26). It was an eyesore, inconsistent with the demarcation of lived spaces along racial lines. Coco takes us to the fateful day to witness the policy's life-altering implications for Kofifi (the slang name for Sophiatown) as government-sanctioned forced removals ensue. Truckloads of untidy piles of Black families and furniture cough up gasoline smoke and churn out dust clouds as they head south of Johannesburg to Soweto (South Western Townships). Coco's and other Coloured families are resettled in Newclare, Westbury, and Coronationville.

> 'I asked my father what it felt like…to be kicked out of a house you grew up in all your life… Everything thrown onto the back of a truck, just as it was, washing from the bath…the toaster still with the toast in it. I asked my father what it felt like?' (*No Room for Squares,* 200: 7)

Intercepting the historical event, Coco employs the subjective voice to bridge the gap between the present and the past. Galvanized by the evocation of familial ties between a father and a son, this interruption potentially transforms our objective witnessing of a historical event, from indifference to empathy. Thus, through a positively disruptive narrative device, Coco reframes the performer/audience equation. The device is further leveraged when Coco makes mention of '…the washing from the bath…the toaster with toast still in it'. However, while consolidating the use of empathy, he also problematizes it by extending it from familial to household referencing.

These complex strategies draw our attention to how narrative and figure converge to create the theatrical experience. They demonstrate how meaningful theatre performance moments emerge from fluid transmutations of literary symbolism, into embodied experience. Audiences affected by such moments are potentially inaugurated into reflective possibilities for meaningful encounters with self and others.

These possibilities cannot, however, be separated from how theatre performance elicits from its patrons, the proverbial 'suspension of disbelief'. Meaningful theatre moments, therefore, may be understood as phenomena ideally cored with complex transactions between performance strategies and the generosity of audience participation. *No Room for Squares* explores the subjective theme of loss as a means to reformulate an otherwise eclectic audience body into a community bound by historical loss.

In the context of South Africa's turbulent political past, the play's subjective voice struck a chord with the historically silenced community. Thus, beyond narrative, the play also set itself up as a ritualistic performance site for remembering differently. It set out to facilitate the refiguration of subjective memories of 'loss', into shared experience. From within such a framework, Sophiatown emerged as the iconic instance of shared dispossession. In other words, Sophiatown was invested with a new communal meaning, adding to the spaces it already inhabits in the complex subjective memory frameworks.

In a cathartic sense, the theatre experience potentially appeals to our nascent need for the communal experience of memory. For it is not the thing lost that we grieve, but lack of public acknowledgment of the deep meanings attached to it. In this sense, the theatre experience delineates itself as a distinct public mirror of

subjectivity. *No Room for Squares* symbolically affronted the pervasive notion of loss' as private affect, and reimagined it rather, as a communal experience, thus demonstrating how performance strategies could be rallied to narrate the community back to itself. These strategies facilitate, that is, the transmutation of loss as an acutely felt subjective encounter, (which articulates itself through what could be termed a nebulous sensory affect) into a public performance experience. In concretizing the notion of loss, the play bridged the distance between subjective and public memory, a performance strategy that explores the spatial juxtaposition of the proximate and distal.

This mediatory power between private and public selves, and between historical and subjective memories, distinguishes the play's theatre praxis as a pivotal link in the interventive processes. It is a potential that carries significant implications for communities who have suffered historical siege, expropriation, and exclusion. Furthermore, it speaks directly to postcolonial projects that advocate for the redress of fractured identities as a consequence of the imperial invasion.
The play's psychological trajectory, however, was in no way the overriding narrative. Parallel to it was one refracted through the prism of a contemporary Coloured lens. Equally compelling, it contested the exclusion of Coloured subjects from popular forms of representation in post-apartheid South Africa.

## *No Room for Squares*: Performing identity discontents

In the domain of popular iconography, memories of Sophiatown (a mutually inclusive 50s Johannesburg ghetto), are reformulated in exclusively black African symbolism.

Appraised from this perspective, *No Room for Squares* is also an expository excursion into the discontents that underscore apartheid victims as a complex, tenuous, and heterogenous mass. In lifting the homogenizing veneer of black victimhood, the play sheds light on the limits, fragility, and overreliance upon, popular nomenclatures as key interpretive tools. The play is a commentary on black African cultural outputs that often exclude Coloured subjects in their representational schemes.

The advent of Coloured exclusion can be mapped to the first internationally acclaimed musical, *King Kong* (1959), which propagated the idea of a black and white African binary as constitutive of the South African racial spectrum. This idea was further projected in Zola Maseko's extraordinary film, *Drum* (2004), in which Sophiatown was cast as an exclusively black neighbourhood. Tsotsitaal - the distinct Coloured language derivative, and signature patois for Sophiatown's 50s notorious gangs - appropriated as a key marker for subcultural identity, was excluded from the film. In both *King Kong* and *Drum*, Coloured absence is writ large.

While the two examples seem differentiated by media platforms, they also share, in their narrative construction strategies, the exclusion of Coloured subjects from popular frames of cultural referencing. They also demonstrate Coloured exclusion as a pervasive phenomenon in the trajectory of South African cultural outputs. *King Kong*'s influence on the cultural landscape is undeniable as a result. If popular art forms shape public opinion, they do so as undeniable watersheds in the cultural imaginary. They exercise formidable influence concerning values espoused in their popular narratives. For example, revisions of Coloured absence in popular cultural outputs bespeak the enduring influence of popular performance practice. Spillages of this kind of influence onto other domains of society carry significant

implications for the politicization of public identities. As a result, Coloured marginality diffuses from cultural spaces to political phenomena. By extension, exclusions of Coloured voices from significant civic processes, is not an exclusively political matter. It is the irrefutable evidence that when marginal public subjects are omitted from popular frames of cultural reference, the corollary is exclusion from significant socio-political participation.

Thus, the popular misconception of the ballot paper as an empowering political event is exposed. For the Coloured subject, the ballot paper is not an isolated event. It is the extension and concretization of the imaginary worlds carved out of popular cultural forms. Central to the above misconception lies the appropriation of Coloured identities into the 'rainbow nation', a collectivizing political desire, enunciated in the parlance of progressive ideals. However, the politicization of extensive identities within a polity that has progressively made Coloured subjects to feel excluded from meaningful civic processes, fails to collapse the historical complexes that linger on unabated. Coco laments this state of affairs thus:

> ‘A lot of people in my situation find themselves wondering just where they fit in. The common response is I am not black enough, or white enough, so am I enough? Who am I better than, or lesser than or equal to? Hopefully, these questions will cease to worry people and we'll all just get along with the fact that we are all just human’. (Ibid, 2)

A collapse of historical identity disparities under the 'rainbow nation' idealism, underscores, among others, the complex phenomenon of a 'new' South Africa. It brings to the fore the complexity of the nature of identity as the repository of historical discontent, and how its politicization under urgent, collective national identity projects, also destabilizes, reduces, and squanders meaningful public activism. Sustained engagement with the adversarial forces implicated in the

construction of individual as well as collective identities is, arguably, one of the key markers of a progressive society. Within such a logic, shared civic spaces are implicated in the imaginary landscapes that represent them.

To this end, this study locates its central argument in the complex junction between popular art forms and polity. Its conjecture of the sympathetic relations between popular forms of representation, and political thought, are founded on observed realities that define Coloured marginality in South Africa's complex cultural-political terms. Below I have truncated into a poem, dominant images, invariably manifest in the framing of the varied memories of Sophiatown. These recycled, recombinant, and incessant images diffuse, from pop songs to spoken word and audio-visual content.

> A place set in colonial apartheid/
> geography framed as ungovernable/
> whose native populace misconstrued proximity to the city/
> for the beginnings of a deplorable African dream/
> a nightmare to the Boers/
> bent on emptying Johannesburg's bowels/
> of gold reservoirs/
> bleeding black hands digging/
> a hovel for a home/
> in Sophiatown

*No Room for Squares* engages performance strategies to contest the marginal position of contemporary Coloured subjects, by drawing attention to the historical roots and trajectory of the phenomenon. In the link between the historical and contemporary political attitudes, lies the play's political plot. Coco's agency foregrounds the efficacy of generational witnessing in performance. As a consequence, the play inevitably highlights the notion of double representation, thereby figuring Coco's representational role as a performer on the one hand and an

embodiment of the collective Coloured voice on the other.

Filtered through Coco's voice, Sophiatown's Coloured subjects - silenced in both official narratives and black African frames of popular memory - speak back to contest exclusive ownership of Sophiatown as a viable commodity on the global cultural stock market.

# Reflection

In the foregoing section, I have embarked on a brief account of the two exemplars of contemporary autobiographical practice, namely, *Umm…Somebody Say Something* and *No Room for Squares*. Furthermore, I have mapped the dissimilar conceptual frameworks in their construction and performances. Central to both boys is the notion of Colouredness. *Umm…Somebody Say Something* reconceptualized Colouredness as a postmodern condition. To a large degree, the play framed itself as the embodied critique of colonial literary traditions, and their predication on pure and impure racial binaries. Freed from imperial shibboleths, the play suggested, identity phenomena represent contested conceptual cites for political power. Added to the play's embodied argument, was that race discourse is not about race. It is essentially a construction of ideas to represent relations between those who have the power to define identity and those defined by it.

*No Room for Squares*, on the other hand, foregrounded Johannesburg Coloured identities as evidence in an imaginary court of appeal, to broker the impasse created by the exclusion of Coloured subjects from meaningful political participation in the democratic processes of a 'new' South Africa. I have drawn inspiration from the two plays, especially from the reflective pre-eminence of

Coloured identities in their narrative plots. The thematic coincidence of Coloured identities in both plays figures as the overarching idea in *Volume Please!* Of the two plays, jazz features significantly in *No Room for Squares* and serves the intervallic function. However, the narrator is not involved in its performance. Jazz, therefore, serves as a narrative-punctuating device, thus investing the play with two distinct performance styles.

*Volume Please!* reimagines the jazz idiom as an intricate part of the plot, simultaneously inaugurating transitions in, and in tandem with narrative continuity. Both narrative and jazz performances depend on the performer, thus placing extra performance demands on the narrator. Autobiography, spoken-word-poetry, and jazz have no precedent as composite performance phenomena in the South African theatre tradition. In this light, *Volume Please!* may be seen as a key participant in the investigation of contemporary black performance strategies, and their relationship to theatre discourse. Employing biography, spoken-word-poetry, and jazz as a means to access the universal vocabulary of black socio-political struggles, *Volume Please!* sets out to expand the horizons of post-apartheid and postcolonial performance pedagogic practices. Reflexive awareness generated from the three-pronged approach to making of *Volume Please!* serves as strong advocacy for a multidimensional approach to performance pedagogies.

This research inquiry has drawn my awareness to the critical link between public performance practices and the academy. Especially to how convergences of popular performance strategies inform recombinant youth vocabularies. Central to these glossaries, hip-hop, and spoken-word-poetry have become the embodied lens through which knowledge about the world is refracted. Pedagogies that promote the propagation of information to the exclusion of youth performance frameworks

potentially constrain the primary task of knowledge creation. To cater for plural academic communities, the academy needs to constantly reimagine itself through a rigorous re-examination of its pedagogic practices and a continuing appraisal of its frameworks.

# Implications for Performance Pedagogies

There is a growing awareness of the need for inclusive approaches to pedagogic praxis. Academic and cultural activist, Dr. Crystal Leigh Endsley pertinently observes that:

> …spoken-word-poetry helps students understand that performance is an important teaching and learning practice, particularly because of its embodied qualities. In their performances students also learn that the exchange between audience and performer is in itself pedagogical, providing them with an opportunity to produce and engage knowledge' (Endsley, 2013: 110)

Endsley's appeal is also a commentary on the separate development approach applied to pedagogic frameworks. It redirects our attention to the rationale behind the compartmentalization of the art discipline, through which fine art, drama, and music are reconfigured such that their relative disposition is rationalized as conceptual difference. Film art, however, refutes the exclusive treatment of these disciplines. Central to its compelling communication strategies is the admixture of music, drama, and architecture. These otherwise disparate disciplines assemble as film material to constitute its multidimensional language. Furthermore, they shed light on the impact of pedagogic approaches upon performance practices.

Assessment frameworks for art as differentiated phenomena are rooted in tradition. Aristotle's Poetics[2] has been the enduring legacy in the systemic approach

[2] Aristotle. The Poetics. London: W. Heinemann, 1927.

to learning and teaching dramatic art. Venerated as primary text for dramatists, and a portal to the aesthetics of stage performance, Aristotle's *Poetics* posits history as the relationship between events, while poetry forges relations between the kinds of things that happen. Poetry, in the classic Aristotelian sense, illumines history.

In the South African context, however, the phenomenon of bifurcated assessments of poetry and jazz is rendered even more complex by the enduring impact of apartheid's social engineering on the 'collective unconscious'. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist, applied the term to elucidate the inborn racial memory, a reservoir of archetypes and universal symbolism applied to legends, poetry, and dreams (Baldick, 2008: 39).

Extrapolation of Jung's logic potentially points to the intricate and latent sympathy between the colonial experience (as constitutive of collective memory), and cultural performance (as restoration of colonial archetypes). In other words, Jung's rationale highlights the connection between the symbolic glossary of shared history and its duplication in the domains of cultural expression.

Representational outputs, therefore, rely significantly on the collective imaginary for their forms. Overarching these forms are the culturally constructed? racial binarism spillages that characterized imperial literary traditions. Extension of the collective unconscious to pedagogical practices has resulted, in the misconception of the branches of representation as differentiated phenomena, and similarly, their inculcation. Reimagining *Volume Please!* as a narrative constructed from seemingly differentiated performance idioms, - jazz, autobiography, and poetry – highlights the potential solidarities in contemporary performance protocols. The approach refigures performance praxis as a potential site for experimentation with eclectic performance models. Practice as research is aptly positioned to allow

for the investigation of the potential impact of performance model alliances on our understanding of performance. It hazards / broaches the critical question of how might the investigation of a coalition of popular performance modes offer new knowledge about the expanding and complex contemporary audience base? Demonstrate that your performance answers this or state that the performance answers this if the answers are embodied and outside language. These concerns locate the academy's teaching and learning practices in the centre.  In what way?

It must be pointed out, however, that jazz performance has peculiar demands. Similar to the dramatic art form, the number of hours required for musical instrument mastery, easily stretches into years.  These functional differences are also central to the paucity of autobiographical practices that incorporate live jazz in the performer's skill inventory. As a consequence, autobiography, jazz, and spoken-word-poetry have, as separate entities, drawn differentiated audiences, and assessment strategies. While they figure as a composite stylistic feature in *Volume Please!* I will, however, treat each separately as relate to my methodological framework.

# The Jazz Framework

Jazz history is African American history. Consequently, jazz is theorized as a sonic repository of slave narratives reference. For me in Africa, jazz is a diasporic phenomenon, essentially, an occurrence enunciated outside of Africa. What this meant for me was that there would be no easy appropriations. If jazz is a novel strategy forged out of bonded and broken men and women who knew first-hand the

awful taste of constriction experience of displacement, then what claims can I lay upon it? What stakes does jazz hold for one like me who has never braved the middle passage and its horrific appendage of displacement?

Perhaps I could plead biological affinity, which would crumble the minute I dared to speak. For then I would speak myself out of the slave narrative framework. My speech accent, my wording, and my apartheid heritage would rush in screaming, claiming me, intercepting my feeble attempt at subterfuge. Why did 'free' men and women in Africa adopt jazz into their cultural repertoire? ('Free' because Africa potentially posits a semblance of home for the African in the diaspora). More pertinently, what informed Patrick, my father's choice of jazz in 50s Sophiatown? And why do I play jazz? These seemingly banal questions lurked at the back of my mind as theoretical puzzles at first; later to become sobering allies in navigating the practical aspect of my research.

In *Jazz Planet: Towards a Global History of jazz*, E. Taylor Atkins responds thus to the 2001 screening of Ken Burn's documentary film *Jazzon*:

> Few of Burn's American critics objected to the film maker's decision to omit virtually all mention of relevant developments in other countries. The setting of the jazz history narrative exclusively within the borders of the United States and the personal experiences of American musicians obviously struck most musicians as natural and unproblematic (date: xi).

*Volume Please!* challenges the geographical undercurrents prevalent in the received perceptions of jazz. While the jazz performance tradition is entrenched in concrete performance spaces, jazz also occupies digital performance spaces. The progressive dynamic in traversing both concrete and digital platforms reconstitute the jazz idiom around global cultural currencies. Within this logic, jazz becomes a part of the radical strategies aimed at the transmutation of concrete geographies into sonic landscapes. Defined as they are, by the absence of solid boundaries, and

therefore beyond traditional policing strategies, sonic landscapes are rendered responsive to reimagined realities. This characteristic in jazz strikes at the heart of bounded geographies, especially their hostility towards fluid, indeterminate, and pluralistic phenomena. *Volume Please!* employs both embodied and sonic experiences central to the jazz phenomenon.

Jazz facilitates the weaving of a seemingly isolated subjective apartheid experience within the framework of meta-narratives that emanate from global meanings attached to the black body. This approach foregrounds jazz as a provocative idea of recombinant meanings. In other words, jazz employs sonic narratives to draw attention to the subtle ways in which subjective, corporeal, historical, and continental meanings converge around, and speak on behalf of the black body in performance. These meanings render the black body invisible, especially when framed within colonial narratives; and equally endow it with conspicuous presence as the 'other', with all the appendages that render it different.

The latter pertains to how in its silence, the body also exclaims its African origins. Perceived through the global lens, the political, cultural, and economic histories of Africa, capriciously summoned by the gaze falling upon the black body, are arbitrarily brought to bear upon its exclamatory presence. The black body, therefore, generates its multifarious meanings from the cusp of its biology and colonial narratives that have passed as official history. It is therefore a body burdened with the border politics of its human and concrete geographies. In this sense, the study is an interrogation of the black body as a contested site of bodily politic.
While these ideas seem relatively accessible to express within a theoretical

framework, they pose difficulty at narrative level and thus necessitate reframing in performance. The use of jazz as the delivery mode in dramatic performance is a difficult choice to make, given its relatively obscure sonic language compared to the more overt, and purely word-based method. Consequently, jazz is a risqué methodology but with much more rewarding returns. For example, the spoken word gaps that it creates offer pragmatic respite from the rigours of an action intensive performance style of *Volume Please!*

The aspect of live music, which adds a popular dynamic to narrative performance, also gave me opportunities to experiment with the interplay between ideas about identity and ways of expressing them in performance. The tension that resulted was surprising at times and forced me into research about the sounds I was encountering in my narrative construction journey. One of these was the concept of call-and-response and its relationship to the pentatonic scale.

# Jazz: Sonic marker of the African and American encounter

In *Volume Please!* I map the enduring conceptual links between the African call-and-response and African American blues traditions that inform the jazz idiom. Both traditions share as their structural roots, the pentatonic scale, which is built from five principal tones or notes (penta = five). The five-tier structure of the pentatonic scale is a sonic rehabilitation of the African conception of the human person, explicated in Abraham (1962: 59-61) and Wiredu (1980: 47), as the combination of (i) nipadu – body, (ii) okra – soul, (iii) sunsum – character, (iv) ntoro – inherited characteristics, and (v) mogya – ghost.

The amalgam of African music and the Blues in jazz was forged from within the transatlantic experience. It subsequently evolved into a sonic slave patois chronicling the complex African - American encounter. Central to the intercontinental encounter was not only the shaping of new identities, but new ways of thinking about, and articulating the tropes associated with these identities. In *Notes of a Native Son*, James Baldwin employs a subjective lens to re-evaluate his black identity in the diaspora.

> I know, in any case, that the most crucial time in my development came when I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of a bastard of the West; when I followed the line of my past, I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. And this meant that in some subtle way, in a profound way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres, and to the Empire State Building, a special attitude. These were not really my creations; they did not contain my history; I might search in them in vain forever for any reflection of myself. (Baldwin, 1955: 6)

Baldwin highlights 'illegitimacy' as one of the tropes that underscore African American presence in the West. In being 'forced to recognize' what he calls 'a bastard of the West', Baldwin is also confronted with the notions of migration and displacement. Although social constructs, these notions are anchored in concrete geographies, whose politics serve as currency in the ideological markets that evaluate identities. Which parallels the experience of being not black enough and not white enough.

To this intractable conundrum, Baldwin chooses to conjure up an attitude, a 'special attitude'. Baldwin's use of conjecture as literary response to the configurations of black bodily politics coincides with the improvisation attitude that is central to jazz. Both conjecture and the jazz improvisation hinge on impromptu performance. Both articulate intuition as a necessary attitude, and the radical response to the logic behind identity categories and their distribution in racially

demarcated geographies.

The African pentatonic scale marks the jazz idiom with distinct geographical origins. Jazz, therefore, functions as performative memory, a sonic assertion of remembering differently. To the libel evoked in the literary trope of illegitimacy, jazz performs a sonic turn. In other words, jazz employs sonic registers in its dialogue with notions of blackness. In so doing, jazz not only invests an otherwise disparaging label with a sense of pride but performs a provocative idea: that perhaps our responses are not always bound to the sites of provocation. Despite the virtues harvested in its generative praxes, jazz is not, however, a homogenous phenomenon. Plagued by debates over provenance and hybridity spillages, the jazz idiom is arguably a phenomenon in flux.

## Jazz in and beyond America

Initially performed from the margins, yet directed at the North American hegemonic centre, jazz has since forged alliances with marginalized subjects beyond its sociocultural context. Its theme of freedom has persistently cut across different social, cultural, as well Initially performed from the margins, yet directed at the North American hegemonic centre, jazz has since forged alliances with marginalized subjects beyond its sociocultural context. Its theme of freedom has persistently cut across different social, cultural, as well as political settings, thus making jazz a sonic platform for the transmission of progressive aspirations.

For example, Christopher Ballantyne chronicles the pervasive influence of cabaret and jazz in South Africa's political imaginary (1991); while Ingrid Monson elucidates on how the three larger social forces – the civil rights movement, the cold

war, and anticolonialism – affected jazz in the years between 1950…and 1967 affected America's political unconscious (2007). She further explicates how 'Jazz improvisation has been cast as a quintessentially democratic and uniquely American art form as well as an enduring symbol for freedom' (Ibid: 4).

Jazz continues to pivot diverse socio-political and cultural discourses, providing strategies for collective and subjective identity performances; the lens through which identity convergences and spillages find critical examination. For this reason, jazz has been harnessed by the civil rights movement, postcolonial and anti-imperial discourses, welcoming the victims of imperial conquests to its fold of progressive sonic narratives.

# Jazz geographies and dissent

Rarely applied in dramatic art praxis, the jazz idiom shares values espoused in progressive theatre performance modes. Much like theatre, jazz mirrors the collective unconscious. In both traditions, we go into dimly lit spaces to hear words we dare not utter, witness prohibited encounters, and are moved to heights of imagination. Thus, these cultural practices exhibit an arguably unique capacity to lend elasticity to the limited spectrum of our mundane lives. Perhaps both praxes owe their enduring influence to the arguably exclusive ability to proffer vicarious experiences. Through their lenses, we are led to hear and see ourselves in a 'new' light, to confront the profound question of the meaning of our lives in relation to the transient phenomenon of life.

Traditionally, jazz venues located on the outskirts of city centres. Bordering metropolitan and passé geographies, they simultaneously distinguish their

respective urbane and working-class communities.  In Johannesburg, this phenomenon finds distinct expression in the layout of Newtown, the cultural hub of the city. Kippie's Jazz Bar is the base of a triangle that opens up to Niki's Oasis restaurant, nestling snugly in the intersection between Margaret Mcingana and Lilian Ngoyi streets. Margaret, the lead singer in the internationally acclaimed 1973 musical, *Iphi Intombi*, was rightfully immortalized with the advent of South Africa's new democratic dispensation. Equally so, was Lilian, whose name is synonymous with anti-apartheid activism.

Bordering Kippie's on one side is a string of restaurants, with Nedbank centring the block. Opposite this structure is the historic Market Theatre. The city of Johannesburg has since immortalized Kippie Moeketsi, the 50s Saxophonist maestro and eponymous brand of Kippie's, with a bronze statue at the entrance of the bar. The only other statue in Newtown is that of the peerless, effervescent, and flamboyant Brenda Fassie, the eternal pop songbird. Today, unfortunately, Kippie's has lost its cultural clout and subcultural lustre.

In its heyday, Kippie's typified the jazz phenomenon, where countercultural encounters take place in marginal civic settings. Usually patronized by racially diverse crowds, the jazz encounter potentially engenders not only alternative social experiences, but also generates progressive communal social structures. Jazz facilitates shared cultural spaces and radically alters normative civic boundaries. But its ultimate achievement is in the momentary dissolution of racial boundaries, and the deployment of progressive values central to countercultural performance protocols.

The resultant atmosphere of 'freedom' that pervades jazz settings, interposes the progressive desire for the permanent collapse of boundaries delineating

concrete as well as human boundaries. Jazz, therefore, functions as ‘ordered unrest’, in how it echoes the sentiments of myriad forms of socio-political unrest. Its peculiar ability to employ sonic vocabularies to express distrust in the enduring concept of ‘society’ as denoting voluntary interrelations, mutual consent, or groups defined by common interests.

The large-scale social unrest that has swept across major cities in the last ten years or so, draws our attention to the conceptual instability and cultural bankruptcy in the term ‘society’. They have spawned critical debates over the ever-widening gap in the spectrum of individual identities and the stagnant notions of ‘society’. What the phenomenon has revealed is how these notions underpin the problematic classifications of civic spaces alongside hierarchies of polity. Essentially, the taxonomic attachment of ‘society’ to the logic used in the construction of hegemonic categories. This connexion not only facilitates the systematic collapse of complex individual identity phenomena but also implicate individuals in the consent to the term’s hegemonic mandate.

The inherent dissent in the jazz phenomenon identifies civic spaces as prime sites for critique. In other words, these sites are critical to the concretization of hegemony’s collectivizing terminology. Incorporating jazz in autobiographical practice, therefore, embeds performance with sonic dissent.

## *Volume Please!* decentering the historical narrative voice

In line with the advocates for individual freedoms, autobiographical performance

refigures individual activism as a potential cultural agency. *Volume Please!* foregrounds Patrick, my father's narrative within the autobiographical framework. While the framework inevitably confines the narrative within a familial catalogue, Patrick's life story, however, has to be read alongside South Africa's socio-political history. To this end, scene three of *Volume Please!* opens with the following lines:

> Patrick. My father…
> …played Marabi jazz in the 50s, a 1930s slum invention.
> But when the Gestapos abducted him to a dilapidated building downtown Johannesburg, bent on cutting off his fingers, an ordeal he miraculously survived, he turned his back on the piano.
> The Gestapos and the Berliners…ruthless gangs that governed the ghetto streets of Johannesburg. Their names betrayed admiration for Hitler's senseless brutality…
> Isn't it funny how black men borrowed names from a bunch of white men in Germany to express their hatred for each other?
> (8)

The above scene excerpt and cursory introduction to Patrick's cultural profile seems caught up in the convoluting intersections of Johannesburg's politics. African gangsters, whose clandestine activities serve as markers of urbane and crude geographies, and the racial desire that plays out in the assumed Germanic taxonomies. Jazz and mobsters, judicious and violent responses to the apartheid social conditioning respectively, are paired together as subcultural informants to Patrick's veritable world. As coexistent countercultural frameworks of Johannesburg's 50s black masses, jazz and gang activity forged confluent responses to the apartheid system. On the ghetto streets, however, they depicted the notion of black class difference, thus marking Johannesburg's fringe geography as a platform for the staging of contested class identities. At stake was the notion of black African homogeneity, reconfigured in the scene as a divergent identity spectrum that turned on the axis of contradiction.

*Volume Please!* demonstrates how these complex encounters redefined the streets of Johannesburg, beyond the geographic detail, as fraught with expressions of black political desire. And how - to the extent that they punctuated the city's pulse - these encounters also masked a much more sinister phenomenon among Johannesburg's black masses: class. To associate 50s black world with class would have been tantamount to the acknowledgment of native individuality. Such an appraisal was inconceivable for the colonial project. Implications for individual encounters with the native would potentially open floodgates of familiarity, the blurring of master/slave boundaries, and who could tell the extent of the taking from the white world by the salves? Thus, the gates of entry into the exclusive white world had to be officially policed.

> 'While the masses vote, and rule, it will be impossible for us to return to good breeding, on which everything depends, and to forbid bad breeding. The people among us we should forbid to breed in the interests of unborn generations – the half-castes, the mental and physical weaklings, the drunkards, the very poor and degraded – are themselves of the majority'. (Curle, 1926: 104, cited in Cornwell, 2012: 17)

Colonial paranoia engendered similar parochial narratives, aimed at the collapse of an otherwise variegated black identity spectrum. To this end, emergent imperial discourses shared a penchant for assessments of black identities as mass phenomena. A brief overview of the titles to the literary output signals preoccupation with corporeality:

> *The Black Man's Place in South Africa*, (Neilsen: 1922)
> *The Native Problem* (King: 1909)
> *South Africa: A Glimpse into the Future: Being a Re-Statement of the Native Problem, and a Discussion of the Principle Underlying Its Effective Solution* (Franklin: 1923)

As literary constructs, these catalogues negated the variegated black identity

spectrum. To this end, they performed subliminal erasure of the concept of heterogeneity in black identity spectra, the result of which was the massification of the African populace.

Consequently, the negation of a variegated black identity spectrum regulating ghetto life resulted, inevitably, in the production of oversimplified narratives that interpreted the African/Caucasian racial difference along a black/white dialectic. Informant to the theoretical frameworks of a colonial hegemon, this dialectical base was elaborated into slave/master, heathen/Christian, and barbaric/peaceful cognates. Thus, reducing to a uniform apartheid standard, intricate black identity performances, and the class structure they underscored. White South African socio-political thought, arguably finds its centre in the shared sentiment to the black body. The historicity of this sentiment finds articulation in Gareth Cornwell's ground-breaking research 'A Teaspoon of Milk in a Bucketful of Coffee: The Discourse of Race Relations in Early Twentieth-Century South Africa' (Cornwell, 2012). Cornwell charts a South African turn of the century black/white race relations scale that cascades from a collective white repulsion for black bodies;

> The social fusion of the black and white races in South Africa is impossible. The marked difference in physical aspect as regards colour and odour renders social intercourse not only difficult, but repulsive, and the barrier is so acutely felt and the dislike so profound and instinctive…' (King 45, in Cornwell 13)

…to fear of genetic contamination through miscegenation;

> In South Africa, [whites] must rigidly segregate themselves from the blacks, and from the half-caste fringes which are forming, or the white strain will gradually disappear.
> (Curle 71, in Cornwell 12)

and anxieties over the failure of both the pedagogue and the missionary to rehabilitate the native.

> …and yet behind this thin veneer of education we know and he knows, and he

> knows we know, lies the true and essential kafir ready to revert, and in his moments of absentmindedness or forgetfulness reverting, to the habits and customs of his innate heathendom [. . .] utterly repulsive and antagonistic to those teachings and traditions of the Gospel and civilization that he has so rapaciously swallowed and digested. (Pabo 347, 348, in Cornwell 13)

At best, the resultant colonial discourse tended to the validation of white racial supremacy via the devaluation of the native. Predicated on bodily difference, the dialectic appropriated the Bible as a universal metatext, and a means to buttress a discriminatory race narrative. In the devaluation of the native, lies the colonialist's explication of the 'self'. Furthermore, the resultant rationale is one in which the colonialist is best understood in the binary terms of what he/she is not.

Investing the kaffir with innate heathendom, repulsion, and antagonism becomes the first instalment of negation in the abstraction of corporeal identities. In other words, the concrete qualities of the black body are therefore narrated with the white body as the basis. Second to it is the stratification of public subjects into social categories, which instalment is normalized in the logic of dominant race discourses. Thus, the devaluation of black identities entailed systematic valorisation of white body politic through the application of literary outputs. It was in the ‘shaping of the social role’ of colonial presence through ‘enhancing the competencies and image’ of white superiority in the public eye (Wolfensberger,1983 paraphrased).

To the global community, black African resistance to colonialism has been unfairly theorized as, and thus confined to, the armed struggle. Black literary labour, however, has been a formidable tool employed against the abstraction of black identities in colonial literary outputs. Through this labour, black writers were vigilant respondents to white writing. One such writer was Ezekiel Mphahlele, a resident of Alexandra township, a black slum that resisted apartheid’s 1950s forced removals. In his classic, *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele chronicles the ideas of 50s black

Johannesburg.

> [In the 1940s] greater pressure was exerted by those who have taken it upon themselves to direct the lives of whole communities 'according to their own lines,' with all the cynical ambiguity the phrase possesses [...]. We retreated to our townships 'to develop along our own lines.' We couldn't see the lines and the footprints. They had got so mixed up with other footprints in the course of time, and the winds had been blowing away some, too. (1986: 166, in Cornwell 11)

If the colonial literary ideal was to contain the black identity tropes it had created, Mphahlele performs a kind of literary spillage from the frameworks of containment. Confined by apartheid's race laws to Alexandra township in the north of Johannesburg, Mphahlele demonstrates the variegated responses to the colonial experience, and how black identity performances framed a distinct cultural class consciousness elided in the official narrative accounts.

Reviewed from within such a context, the confrontation between Patrick and the Gestapos defies simplistic appraisals based solely on corporeality. If the re-staging of history's grand events entails subsumption of the subjective voice, the autobiographical model performs restoration of the discrepancy. The Patrick/Gestapo encounter foregrounds the untenable link between the historical homogenization of the black masses and the actual complex cultural class performances that emanated from Johannesburg's 50's black populace.

Consequently, Patrick's autobiographical detail demonstrates critical commentary on the overriding idea of apartheid South Africa as an island, fringed, and impervious to external influence. It is a counternarrative to the historicity of a culturally isolated Johannesburg. To this end, *Volume Please!* foregrounds jazz as the pervasive force, resistant to the logic of bounded geographies, and how the jazz idiom's revolutionary sonic vocabularies signalled an aesthetic response to anti-black rhetoric. And to Johannesburg's 50s black populace, jazz was more than

appealing, the idiom carved out a class dedicated to its sophistication.

# Jazz influence on black class consciousness in 50’s Johannesburg

The stream of American musical motion pictures featuring African Americans had a profound impact on Johannesburg’s black urban class. Encountering images of successful black folk was unprecedented in the colonial-apartheid cultural experience. Even more remarkable was that these black figures were performing their music, jazz. Fats Waller in *Ain’t Misbehaving* (1941), Louis Armstrong in *Shine* (1942), The Mills Brothers and Dorothy Dandridge in *Paper Doll* (1942), and Nat King Cole and Ida James in *Is you or is you not my Baby?* (1944), to name but a few. For Johannesburg’s black progressive class, association with the jazz tradition was a means facilitated the strategic comparative performance.

The African compared him/herself to the African American on the bases of shared biological traits that delineated the black skin as a marker of universal racial oppression. Consequently, offshore gains of the kin were adapted to local cultural production schemes. *King Kong* exemplified this phenomenon. The assimilation of *King Kong* into the jazz category signified important cultural developments in mid-century Johannesburg. As a burgeoning metropolis, Johannesburg was the melting pot for divergent economic, political as well as social forces. In *King Kong*, township jazz was the organizing strategy employed to figure Johannesburg as the synapse between rural and urban cultural forces. Jazz became the cultural marker to delineate between naïve and sophisticated Africans, a means to regulate the border between pastoral and metropolitan identity tropes.

The Johannesburg that emerged in *King Kong*'s narrative plot was framed within a black musical format. Concerned with the rehabilitation of the township from the fringes of Johannesburg as a political centre, jazz became the sonic alliance in the play's radical cultural response. However, jazz's potential countercultural agency was subsumed in the play's overriding exoticism. *The Daily Mail*'s publicity column hailed the play as one 'sizzling, seething, exuberant song and dance festival' (reference: writer, date and entry in bibliography).

'Township Jazz Opera' captured the bizarre, fantastic, and strange phenomena signalled in the play's publicity. Thus, *King Kong* was the popular embodiment of the connection between Johannesburg and the African diaspora. In The foundations of black jazz in South Africa, cultural commentator, Christopher Ballantyne, remarks:

> 'For several decades, urban Africans were held in thrall by American culture – but above all by the activities and achievements of blacks in that society …the confident assertion of racial and cultural identity between blacks at home and in the United States. People of colour in the USA were 'Africans in America'; therefore, their achievements were a source of very great encouragement to 'Africans in Africa' (1991: 122).

Ballantyne extends the classic theoretical assessment models, especially the role of the jazz idea in apartheid South Africa. These models, at best shed light on the local cultural landscape and its development. However, seldom is the jazz language appraised within countercultural frameworks.

# Language, performance, and duplicity

In general, spoken language is a two-edged sword. It unifies as it sets apart. Perhaps

like shared geography and culture, if not more so, language simultaneously unifies a community, while separating it from the rest of the world. But more critical, is the implication of shared language in the ongoing struggle between marginal social subjects, on the one hand, and political centres of power, on the other. It is also a struggle for meaningful ownership of the tools that carve out meaning, pictures, and narratives about the world.

These tools converge in one centre. Language. The ultimate terminus of human expression. Conveying desire, dreams, and ideas, language has proven to be the definitive connective junction between individuals, parties, and ideologies. Because language instantiates complex ideas for everyone, it is by the same token inaccessible for everyone. Perhaps Jeanette Winterson captures more precisely the ambiguity that embeds language usage when she remarks: 'Language always betrays us, tells the truth when we want to lie, and dissolves into formlessness when we would most like to be precise' (2007: 100).

For this reason, language is a contested site. Statues, murals, and paintings stretch the spectrum of dominant power narratives. Because they do not rely on language 'proper', they become powerful allies in the propagation of dominant language discourses, and equally so, their discontent. Thus, when whole communities brave the military might of repressive governments, they perform discontent, within the framework of language contests. Shared language, therefore, performs indifference. It frames both the construction of dominant ideologies and the revolutions that oppose them. This indifference projects, in other words, duplicity as language's central subterfuge. When employed in the expression of identities, language deploys its betrayal, extends its duplicity, and invests identity definitions with instability.

No more is identity instability eloquently expressed than in the growing trend of nationalism sweeping across major cities around the world. European cities, in the forefront, punctuate this phenomenon with mass rallies that clamour for the restoration of geographic borders, and revisions of court jurisprudence to national identities. From a colonial perspective, these public protests demonstrate how the West precludes the use of the routes it employed to navigate and explore Africa, for example. In such a schema, the African is denied the right to retrace the steps back to empire.

However, this is tangential to the question of identity instability. Initially, national identity performances may seem tangential alongside escalating agitations for individual identity legitimacy. performances. To the contrary, they express the dialectic that embeds public identity performance, and how it forestalls the reliance of individual upon group identity frameworks. But more poignantly, the phenomenon draws our attention to the ideological basis of identity construction and performance. In his seminal essays on ideology, Louis Althusser remarks on the complex nature of language as both derivative and precursor of ideology (reference). The human species, he postulates, has not advanced enough in terms of cognition, to construct independent ideological frameworks. He advances to assert that, even the most vicious of revolutions has to borrow language from the very ideologies it opposes. In other words, revolutions not only underscore language as a problematic for meaning construction; the very concept of language in general, and language ownership specifically, are at the core of public protests. As a countercultural idiom, jazz formulates its sonic languages outside the domain of shared language. Thus, jazz is a radical response to the simultaneity of unity and disruption endemic to shared language practices.

# Jazz as sonic language

Generalizing from the premise that jazz circumvents language as a means to resist being subsumed in the inherent ambiguities prevalent in language schemes; this section examines the relationship between jazz and dominant language performances. Furthermore, this segment locates foci on how the jazz schema performs critical commentary on the official voice that confers legitimacy on languages of hegemony. Especially how the official voice, via assimilations of dominant language protocols, performs the simultaneity of content and framework in the construction of historical content.

Thus, foregrounding how the official voice becomes the sole determinant and interpreter of social interactions, and how privileged interpretations in turn frame historical narratives. in other words, how the official voice acts as an exclusive means to decode the complexity of social organization by conferring upon it, simplistic narrative trajectories.

In so doing, official languages inevitably perform duplicity of hegemony, thus entrenching their claim to political power. As a countercultural alternative to dominant narrative performances, the jazz idiom harnesses contradiction to its sonic vocabularies. Founded upon a framework of opposing forces, jazz is simultaneously set against the propagation of the official voice in mainstream culture, and most importantly, against its inherent contradiction: the opposition of the individual to the group, in the collective black narrative.

Within the seemingly homogenous sonic narrative field, jazz also provides a framework for the articulation of intuitive, subjective, and often elided aspects of

that narrative. A junction for both individual and shared experiences on the one hand, as well as African and diasporic encounters on the other, jazz, becomes an intricate location for the preservation and critique of what it means to be black. And the revision of the use of black corporeality as reference to the homogeneity of the African identity. In his revolutionary work, The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates reflects on the notion of tension as characteristic of jazz:

> There is a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment…springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive canvasses of a painter) a definition of his identity: as an individual, a member of the collectivity and a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it (1988: 1).

If the jazz priority is, among others, to find one's identity, the crucial link to mine was missing. Even in his absence, I realize the significance of my father in the construction of my identity. I realize also, not without trepidation, the ordeal of it all. The pursuit of jazz then facilitates the search and hopefully an encounter of sorts with my father. My search becomes relentless. The sound will not let me be. I wonder what drew him to it, what led him to jazz. So, I go through the pendulum of emotions, swinging between frustration and hope. The silence that confronts me, punctuated as it was, by my longing for the many conversations we might have had, the inevitable fights we may have encountered in the bittersweet fashion of fathers and sons.

Perhaps the intuition to hazard the yawning abyss between us, only armed as I was, with a few jazz pieces, bespeaks my desperation. Unknown to me then, was that I would eventually emerge from the void, with *Volume Please!* as a sole witness that I had been to the river Jordan, and had waded in her cold waters. It then dawned

on me, not immediately, as dawns are wont to do, that although I did not get all the answers to my questions, I had dared to ask. The questions remain still, but the rough grain to their teeth has given way to a gnarled but innocuous grin.

The significant implications of the jazz phenomenon in my life and Patrick's, my father, critically influence the framework in *Volume Please!* Thus, jazz functions first as a link between our life histories, and a means to reconnect seemingly irreconcilable identities. In this sense, the autobiographical jazz musical is an experimental methodology aimed at reimagining identity performance strategies. The method seeks to address the critical question: what potentially materializes when we reorient subjective positionalities that are subsumed in the grand scale of historicizing perspectives?

In other words, what alternative strategies are available in the face of the overriding struggles of our times, emanating from the growing suspicion among the marginalized social subjects that official centres insist on generic narratives as a means to explain individual complex identities.

# Conclusion: re-contextualization

## Historicity and autobiography: Contesting narrative frameworks

Patrick was a Coloured subject whose identity was significantly shaped between Sophiatown and Westbury. The latter was officially designated for Coloured communities. I, on the other hand, officially registered as black African at birth, grew up in Bosrand, a black township and home to migrant mineworkers and their families. Constructed within mutually exclusive historical contexts, our identities are marked by history as undisputable heterogenous phenomena. Differentiated by language registers and accents, historical settings, and cultural traits, our life histories share 'difference' as the predominant common feature and are fixed as such on the pages of history.

The notion of difference, therefore, as an ostensibly irrefutable claim by history on the construction of our life stories, performs a kind of permanence around which the meanings of our identities pivot. The thinking that history is a post-reality phenomenon, that it is backward-looking and therefore has little or no direct bearing on the present, is a misconception of history's complex performance schema. While history points to the past, it significantly influences the present, and potentially determines the future. In other words, history's enduring power locates in its form, which facilitates the assemblage of disassociated meanings such that the past, present, and future fold into a seamless narrative.

The jazz framework in *Volume Please!* underscores history's complex formats, upon which history's subterfuges are reliant. Consequently, this inquiry draws foci on the

problematic link between colonial, apartheid, and post-apartheid regimes in South Africa's present democracy. The overriding evidence that the three regimes share a common feature, is the marginal positioning of South African Coloureds in the country's socio-political spectra. A closer reading of this phenomenon links Coloured marginality to the historical narratives that embed popular cultural outputs. *Volume Please!* employs autobiography to include the subjective voice in the historicizing cultural patterns.

*Volume Please!* is an attempt at raising the metaphoric decibels of the silenced collective Coloured voice. In the staging of Coloured subjectivity, the play contests the historical frameworks that have narrated the Coloured story as collective phenomena. To borrow from the acclaimed novelist, essayist, and dramatist, James Baldwin:

> Though we do not wholly believe it yet, the interior life is the real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world (1961: 230)

Because they privilege the subjective voice, public performances strike at the heart of historical narrative schema. They reveal the intransigent link between cultural practice and the dominant political imaginary. Furthermore, they demonstrate how the pervasive reach of history reconfigures individual identities in the image of the collective. Within such a configuration, the complexity attributed to identity performance inevitably collapses into collective and oversimplified phenomena. Herein lies the basis for the politically motivated, history determined distribution of public spaces. Herein too, is the conceptual junction for the enduring sympathetic relations between the maintenance of official catalogues, and the propagation of historical traditions.

These interconnections implicate in the regulation of social subjects through

a systematic demarcation of geographical spaces according to race. For this reason, Coloured communities still occupy the fringes of political, cultural, and economic centres. Coloured marginality, is often theorized outside the critical assessment of historical metanarratives. The resultant lacunae equally hide ideological, which further leads to misconceptions of the Coloured situation.

The idea that the dismantling of the draconian apartheid system in South Africa has given rise to a democratic dispensation serves, at the narrative level, the national metanarrative. Based on empirical evidence enunciated by contemporary Coloureds - 'In the past, we were not white enuff, in the new South Africa we are not black enuff' – the 'new' democratic dispensation is, at best, an oversimplification of national transformation. In the apartheid social engineering schema, racial classification figured as a divisive tool. But more pointedly, it was employed to order difficult, and at times contradictory facts about South Africa into overly simplistic truths. This phenomenon, unfortunately, refigures in the sweeping narratives that seek to disseminate myths about the new democratic rhetoric.

As connective synapse between polity and the civic, cultural expression frames individuals into collective identities and imposes homogenous interpretations upon heterogeneity. These praxes not only inform the construction and consumption of history. They equally buttress the problematic notion of historicity as the sole interlocutor of identity. In so doing, they tend to obscure the sweeping, largescale, and collective narratives constructed in historical narratives. In other words, historical narratives oversimplify the complexity of identity.

In relation to history, autobiography is the subjective voice that critiques of the chronological ordering of life events as collective phenomena. In the refiguration of the relationship between the events in our lives, autobiography interpolates

subjective meanings omitted in the grand scale of historical accounts. The aim of autobiographical materials, therefore, is the disruption of the continued deployment of official interpretations in the construction of our identities. It is to destabilize the centrality of the official voice in the definition, and documentation of individual histories. Autobiographical performance, therefore, employs the body to write subjectivity on stage, and to pose the question: Who's writing agency is being privileged in popular narratives?

Autobiography challenges the generative meanings that embed historiography. Advancing from the premise that there persists a silent yet radical dichotomy of meaning between the two terminologies: autobiography and historiography. 'Graph' is a Greek term for writing, and by extension, graphology is 'the study of graphic signs in a given language, and 'bioi' (lives), a Greek plural form of life. Both point to the critical notion of agency in the act of graphing (writing). Biography insists on the validity of the subjective voice, which invests the lived experience with authenticity. Thus, biographical practice challenges the all-encompassing agency in historiographic performances.

This research has contrasted differentiated schemes - historicity and autobiography as narrative construction strategies. Proceeding from the notion that Patrick and I share identities that are predetermined by history; I have mapped the large-scale implications of the official voice in the construction of historicized narratives. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how individuals who feel marginalized, employ the autobiographical performance framework to question the fidelity of the official voice in popular narratives. This equation underscores the inquiry about Coloured marginal positioning in South African cultural practices. Implications of agency in both historical and autobiographical accounts were juxtaposed to highlight

the thematic and ideological concerns that differentiates approaches to narrative construction and performance.

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